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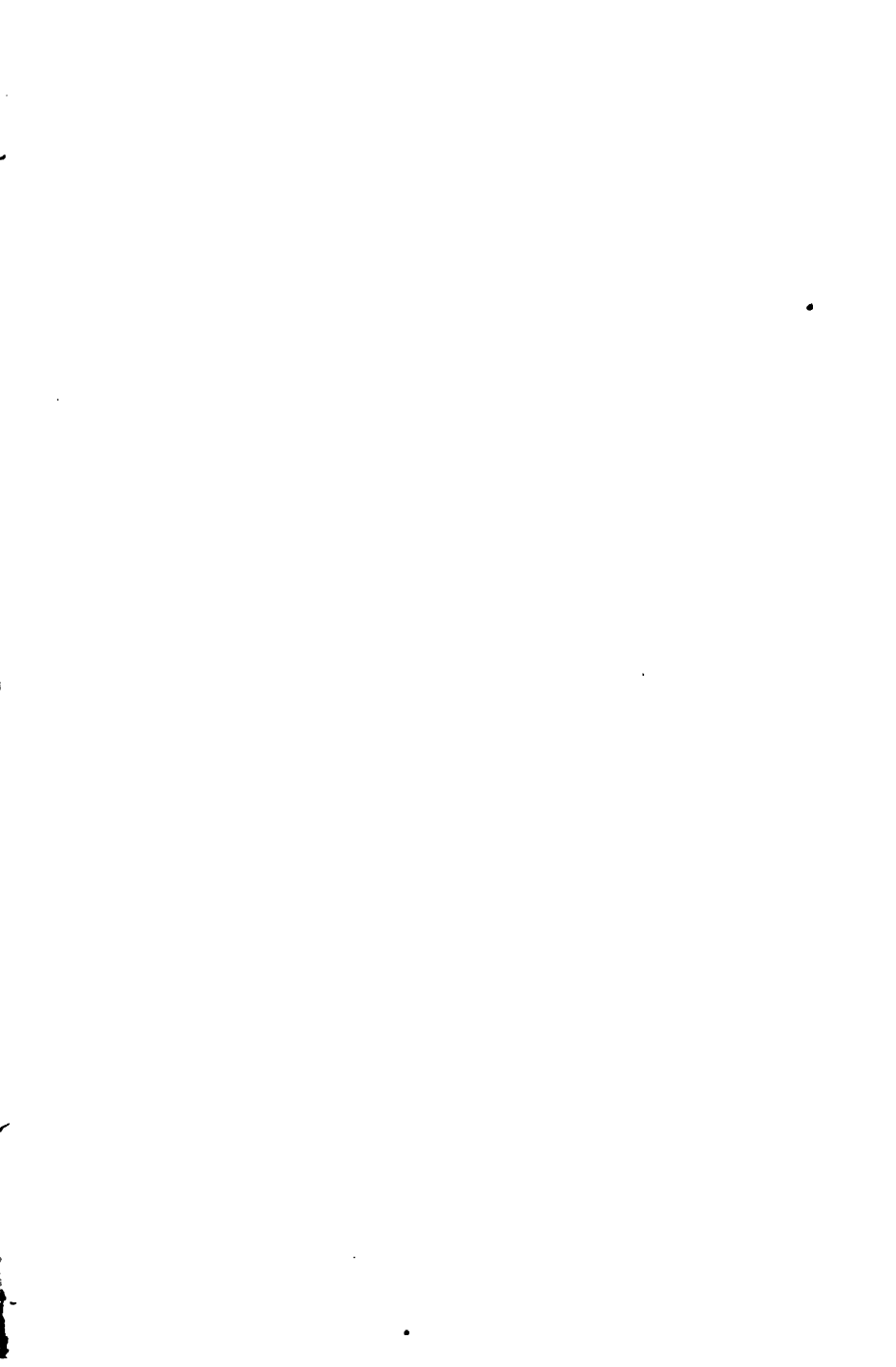
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LOST IN A GREAT CITY

BY

AMANDA M. DOUGLAS

AUTHOR OF "IN TRUST" "STEPHEN DANE" "CLAUDIA"
"SYDNE ADRIANCE" ETC.



BOSTON
LEE AND SHEPARD PUBLISHERS
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TO

CARRIE GREENHALGH COLYER,

FOR THE KINDLY INTEREST EVINCED IN
MY LITTLE HEROINE;

FOR THE SINCERE AND PLEASANT FRIENDSHIP THAT HAS BLOSSOMED
OUT OF A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE,
ALLOW ME TO

DEDICATE THIS STORY TO YOU,

AS A CHRISTMAS GIFT.

ROSEVILLE, 1880.

A. M. D.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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LOST IN A GREAT CITY.

CHAPTER I.

A WAIF OF FORTUNE.

"BUT I am so afraid, Maggie! The horses are so large, and those great wagons and all the people! Oh, I can't, I can't!"

"Catch tight hold of my dress, so. And don't you remember that I told you I was to be your mamma now?"

"You are *not* my mamma, Maggie!" and the child threw back her head with a proud, indignant gesture, as if some right of birth asserted itself unconsciously. "You are my own dear mamma's nurse-maid, and I cannot call you anything but just Maggie. My mamma is in heaven, and I can never have another one."

As she stood there on one of the down-town corners of Broadway, she made a noticeable picture. A rarely beautiful child of seven years, though small for her age, shaped with exquisite symmetry, slender, yet not thin, with a certain supple gracefulness characterizing every movement, and not less remarkable in her present pose. The complexion was of a peculiar pearly tint; her hair pale golden, abundant, and waving over her shoulders a rippling mass. A child with the impress of birth and breeding, young as she was; and one would guess instantly that the neat, common-place woman beside her could be of no kin, and that she was used to occupying the position of an inferior,

while the little lady had about her an unmistakable, but not unpleasant air of authority.

There was a surge of vehicles just then that rendered Broadway impassable for the moment, so Maggie, her hands full of parcels, turned, rather vexed at the child's pertinacity and lack of courage.

"I should like to know what you would do without me?" she inquired sharply. "Suppose you were left here in the street to starve, or a policeman took you up to the Island where they put children when their fathers and mothers die, — hundreds of little girls like you, — and they get more cuffs than kisses, too, I can tell you! You might a great deal better have me for a mamma!"

"But I can't, Maggie, don't you see?" and a long, dry sob burst up from her chest. "I will be good, and do whatever you tell me, only I cannot say mamma to any one. It would break my heart! And my dear mamma in heaven would not like it, I am sure. She never had any little girl but just me."

"There, come along now," was the rather impatient rejoinder, as there was a lull in the busy stream, a break in the endless procession. "Keep tight hold of my dress until we get clear across, and nothing will hurt you. Come — don't be afraid!"

The woman hugged her parcels closer, and saw that the child did as she was bidden. They had achieved half of their perilous journey in safety, when, glancing up, the child saw the great head of a horse above her, to her vivid imagination as fierce as the wolf that threatened Little Red Riding-hood. A sudden terror took possession of her, and with one scream she fled in wild affright back to the curbstone from whence she had started. There was a dreadful din in her ears, a sea of strange faces around her. Panic-stricken, she ran on and on, breathless, frightened beyond reason, and at every step plunging farther into an unknown country.

She did not dare cross any street, so following the sidewalk brought her back again to Broadway. Then her unreasoning terror began to be replaced by anxiety. Where was Maggie? How could she get over to her? She glanced up and down, and the strange faces frightened her. What should she do?

A big, good-natured-looking errand-boy noticed her perplexity, and halted.

"What's the matter, Sis?" he asked in a roughly pleasant tone. "Want to get across?"

"Yes," was the timid rejoinder.

"Where are you going?"

"Maggie is over there waiting for me," she answered, with the dignity of a queen.

"Oh! Well, give us your hand."

It was such a white, dainty hand that he felt awed by the sight of it. Then obeying a sudden impulse, he picked her up in his arms and ran across, putting her down again carefully.

"I am much obliged to you," she said, graciously.

"But where is — what did you call her — Maggie?" and he looked wonderingly around.

"I can find her. Good-morning;" and she courtesied with womanly gravity.

"What a little beauty!" and he stared sharply after her as the white dress and golden hair rippled in the sunshine. Then he remembered his errand, and went his way like one dazed. Already her sad and fatal empire of attraction had begun.

She walked on with wild, wondering eyes, catching her breath in gasps; then a gray dress flitted before her in the distance, surmounted by a hat with black ribbons. She quickened her pace, — ran, indeed, — crossed the next street without a single flutter, and finally came up with the woman.

"Maggie! wait, Maggie!" and she clutched the dress.

The person turned — a girl of eighteen, with a coarse, flippant face.

"I'm not your Maggie — nor any one's servant. What do you want?"

"Nothing;" and the child shrank back, her lip quivering piteously.

"A high compliment, I declare, to be taken for a nurse-maid!" and the young woman tossed her head angrily.

The child went on. Now and then a figure in the distance led her astray, and she plunged hither and thither. The crowd seemed to grow less, the tramping horses and wagons did not form such an unbroken procession. But the day became warmer, and she grew very tired. Her little feet ached, her temples throbbed, her heart fluttered with an alarm that was rapidly turning awesome. She tried to think, but her small brain was a chaos of confusion.

She dropped down on a step in a shady corner. Near by an old woman sat dozing at an apple-stand, with a dingy green umbrella over her head. Her clothes were shabby, her face wrinkled, and browned with the sun, wind, and perhaps lack of washing, and flecks of snuff sprinkled her protruding chin. Yet she had a rather kindly expression, and the child recalled some of the old women in the wonderful stories that her mamma used to read to her.

The apple-woman nodded to herself, keeping one eye half open.

"I knows 'em," she mumbled. "A-lookin' like angels, an' 's if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, and when yer back's turned they'll grab an' run. No, my purty kid, you don't come that game on me!"

But as the old woman watched, the child leaned against the side of the building, and, quite overcome with heat, fatigue, and anxiety, the little head began to droop, the eyelids to quiver, the hands folded in her lap were motion-

less. Sleep had overtaken her. Now and then some passer-by stared at the vision of loveliness, and gave a sharp glance at the apple-woman. It was no one's business. Children are not so great a rarity in a crowded city.

An hour or two passed before she woke, and then she started up in sudden affright. Oh, where was she! How did she come in this strange place — alone!

The old apple-woman was moved. She hobbled to the step, attracted by the look of helpless innocence.

"Where'd you live, Sissy?" she asked in a shrill, cracked voice.

The child rubbed her eyes in the utmost bewilderment, and instinctively shrank away.

"Where be yer goin', then? Ain't lost nor nothin', be yer?" and she peered curiously in the sweet face.

"I don't know," hesitatingly. "I am trying to find Maggie. She went across the street —"

"But ye've bin here a good hour, asleep."

The child swallowed a sob resolutely, and winked the tears out of her eyes.

"Come, hev a cake or an apple! Yer purty as a pink. Where's yer mammy?"

"Mamma is dead, and papa is ever so far away across the ocean. But I want Maggie!"

"An' I'm sure I don't know nothin' about her. Here, take this apple, and chirk up a bit. Where did Maggie cross the street?"

"It was on Broadway."

"Hi! but you're a piece from Broadway! This is the Bowery, my dear. Long ago there used to be bowers in it, an' lads an' lasses courtin'. Don't look much like it now!" and the old woman chuckled. "There, my purty! won't yer hev a cake?"

She picked up one, and brushed off the dust. The child hesitated from natural fastidiousness; then her well-trained

courtesy, joined with the pangs of hunger, impelled her to accept.

"I thank you very much," she said, proudly. "Now I must go and find Maggie."

"Where do yer live?"

"With Maggie's cousin," was the dignified answer.

"But what's her name, and where's the street?"

"Her name is Mrs. Brown. It is—you go through Broadway, and up ever so many stairs."

"Yer lost, child, that what's the matter. Now you jest wait 'til a p'leceman comes along, and we'll tell him. He'll take yer ter station-house, and there yer'll be snug as a bug in a rug 'til yer folks come to find yer!"

That thought roused the child's terror again. The policeman would take her to the dreaded island Maggie had spoken of, and then she might not see her dear papa when he came. Perhaps she had been very naughty not to call Maggie mamma. If she could go straight to her mamma in heaven! Did people always have to be covered in a box, and put in the ground, she wondered!

"I had better try to find Maggie," she said with sudden strength and resolution. Then a flush of embarrassment overspread her face as she added, "I should like to pay you for the cake, but I have no money. I will ask Maggie to do it to-morrow."

"Never you mind, my chicken. I'm a poor old body, to be sure, but I don't grudge a bite to a stray. An' if you don't find her, come back, an' we'll do the best we can."

"Thank you."

"Ye'r welcome for the sake of yer purty face. Now d' think yer can find her? I'm afeard—that's to Broadway, and may the saints attind ye,—for sure they'd be main cruel if they didn't!"

Our poor little waif turned in the right direction, but did not keep it long, bewildered by the strangeness of her surroundings. A little girl lost in a great city.

to ask, and peering cautiously into women's faces to find some trace of her lost nurse! She wiped away her tears quietly as she went on with uncertain step.

And now the streets began to fill with people again. There was a jostling and hurrying, cries of newsboys, laughing shrieks of children, rattling of wagons, jangling of car-bells, the jargon of slang, interspersed with profanity, the strange tongues, and noisy hubbub. No wonder she shrank away, not even daring to look wide-eyed and wistful.

Here limbs ached, and her feet were sore. Oh, what could she do! "Maggie!" she cried, softly; "Maggie!" but only the babel of confusion answered her. Sobs shook her slender frame, and now the tears fell fast.

She had wandered by this time to the festering by-ways of the city. The vile odors sickened the child, so long used to fragrant country air. The streets were heaps of filth; the sidewalk swarmed with dirty children. Some one caught her roughly, another jeered at her, a tongue was thrust almost into her face, and she found herself surrounded by a mocking crowd.

"Ain't I fine! Ain't I fine! I'm goin' to the ball, I am. Say, Sis, lend me your button boots! oh my, white kid! Look at me!" and the girl, about her own size, picked up her filthy, tattered skirts, and wriggled about with the airs of a would-be fine lady.

"Lem me yer sash, won't yer? Why didn't yer have red — that's all the style?"

"How much for yer wig, Sis?"

"I say, gim'me a penny! You've got lots in your pockets, I know, and a goold ring on your finger —"

"Oh, I know!" shrieked another. "She dances at the theaytre. Look at the gold chain on her neck!"

She turned from one to another, and beheld only a group of mocking, cruel faces. The grand virtues of pity and mercy seldom course in the blood of street Arabs, who are

trained by the stern instincts of self-preservation to raise their hand against every one, and too often to lead the attack. Brown, handsome creatures, some of them, under the dirt and rags; but with the limbs of infant gods, they united the foul fierceness of fiends, for brutes are rarely so cruel.

Hounded thus, shivering with terror, weak and helpless against her tormentors, she gave one wild, piercing cry, and sprang at them as if to force a way through with her small white hands.

"Hillo! What's all this row?" exclaimed a coarse but not unfriendly voice. "Teddy McGinnis, what are you doing here in a crowd of girls!" and a well-directed cuff sent the urchin sprawling. "Liz Levy, you let that young un alone or I'll smash your mug! What are you all doing to her?"

The crowd fell back. Tim Chafney was not to be braved in any street encounter, as these little roughs knew to their sorrow.

"Oh, save me! save me!" the child shrieked, throwing herself in his arms.

An angry woman rushed out and caught one of the ragamuffins by the hair of her head, and hustled her up an alley way.

"What did you do to her?" demanded the champion. "Be off, or I'll break your heads? Now, what is it, poor little thing? How did you come here?"

She was sobbing so hysterically that she could not utter a word, yet she clung to him with frantic desperation.

"You're lost, I'spose—that's the trouble. Shall I take you to a station-house, or will you tell me. You're a sight too nice to live in these holes, or even in Kelly's palace,"—with a broad grin. "How did you get here?"

"I wa—wa—want Maggie!" she sobbed.

"And who's Maggie? There, don't cry so! Come, we'll get out of this beastly hole. Now tell me all about

it! Who's your dad, and where does he hang out? He must be a reg'lar buster!" eyeing her with curious surprise.

"I want Maggie! I lost her when we went to cross the street — Broadway. And I've looked, and looked. Oh, what shall I do?"

"She wasn't your mammy, of course?"

"No. My mamma is in heaven with the angels. Maggie was mamma's maid, and we came to New York for papa, who is way across the sea."

Tim Chafney looked puzzled.

"When did you come to New York?"

"On Tuesday."

"And you was crossing Broadway! How ever did you get way over here? I'd best hunt up a peeler."

"A — what?" in wild-eyed terror.

"P'liceman —"

"Oh, don't! don't!" she implored, hysterically.

"What then? will you go home with me?"

"Oh, yes. Take me! I will be so good. I will stop crying right away — only — I cannot help it. It all comes up in my throat, and I'm so tired. And then you'll go look for Maggie?"

How beseeching the little voice sounded, broken with convulsive sobbing.

"You poor little kid! I'm afraid I couldn't find her to-night; but I'll take you home, and then we will see in the morning."

"You will not let any one hurt me, I know," with trusting eagerness.

"You may bet your head on that! Come, chip up a bit. This way, — it's not far."

Then Tim Chafney suddenly plunged his remaining hand into his pocket, and himself into a thoughtful mood, and gave a long, low whistle. Mother Mell was not always in a serene mood, and at times somewhat free with

her bony knuckles. And Tim's father was rather tricky; but then what could he do to a little girl who could not be robbed or cheated at cards, nor even made drunk, and important secrets wormed out of her?

Then he took a curious survey of his *protégé*. The dainty white dress was sadly tumbled and soiled, but there was a style to it quite different from the tawdry finery the women in Tim's circle displayed. And though her eyes were swollen, and her face flushed with weeping, she was still lovely, — something above Tim's comprehension, and he suddenly felt ashamed to offer her the hospitalities of his dingy abode.

"But then it's only for one night," he ruminated. "Tomorrow I'll hunt up her folks. Poor thing! She wasn't meant to take life rough-and-tumble, as we do. And so her mammy's dead —"

"I'm so tired," she said; and the weary little face turned toward him with touching wistfulness.

"We'll soon be there, and you shall have some supper. How long ago were you lost?"

"This morning. We went out after breakfast, and Maggie bought such nice bananas! Oh, my dear Maggie!" and the child began to weep afresh.

CHAPTER II.

IN A HOSPITAL WARD.

MEANWHILE, what had befallen Maggie? She heard a cry and missed the tug at her skirt, and turned to see a flash as of a skimming swallow, then an omnibus hid it. Stupified, she did not notice the span of horses coming down, and the indecision of the moment was fatal. The pole struck her, the horses trampled her under their feet, then were jerked up suddenly by the driver, and the carriage stopped.

"Oh, what has happened?" cried the lady occupant.

"I will see;" and the gentleman sprang out.

The girl lay bleeding and insensible. The coachman and Mr. Byington were at once surrounded by a throng of curious pedestrians, and a policeman made his appearance.

"I'm awfully sorry," declared the coachman. "She dodged right under the horses heads, though I jerked them up in a flash."

"Not killed, is she?"

"Bring her to the sidewalk."

"Take her to the nearest drug store," commanded Mr. Byington. "I hold myself responsible for the poor thing's injuries."

They picked her up carefully, and a gaping crowd followed.

His wife leaned out of the window, while he made a brief explanation, then ordered the carriage to follow him. When they reached the drug store she summoned her husband.

"Edward," she said sympathetically, "have the unfortunate creature taken to St. Luke's Hospital. We know she

will have the best of care, and I cannot bear to think of her being huddled into any overcrowded public place."

"I will see to it," he made answer.

The crowd was peremptorily dismissed. The woman being removed to an inner apartment an examination was speedily made. One arm was broken and the flesh much mangled. A cut just at the edge of her forehead, a bruise on her cheek, and, it was feared, some internal injuries as she remained insensible so long.

The officer had gathered up her parcels and her reticule. Mr. Byington searched it, as well as her pocket-book, but no clue to her address was found.

"I wish her taken to St. Luke's Hospital," he said at length. "Present this card and there will be no delay. To-morrow Mrs. Byington will visit her, and everything in our power will be done. Lift her carefully, poor thing."

He re-entered the carriage and imparted the meagre facts to his wife.

"I suppose she was alone, then! Why will people never learn to carry a card with their name and address! But we may be able to discover her friends as soon as she returns to reason. I only hope there are no little ones at home watching and waiting for their mother."

When Margaret Donald returned to thorough consciousness she had been an inmate of the hospital ten days, suffering from congestion and fever, and though her kind nurses had not actually despaired of her life, still she had lain in a very critical state. The cut and bruises had mended, and there was only the broken arm.

"Where am I?" she asked in a feeble tone.

The low voiced sisters briefly explained.

"Ten days!" she exclaimed in a tone of anguish, starting up wildly. "Oh, my God! what has become of Elsinore — my darling Miss Nora!"

"Hush; you must not excite yourself in this manner," was the soft entreaty. "One of our patrons, Mrs. Bying-

ton, had you sent here. Their carriage accidentally ran over you, and she has been every day to see you."

"Did she take Nora? Tell me quick!" and the poor thing clutched the nurse's arm in frantic eagerness, staring out of feverish eyes.

"I do not know, though I think it probable. She will tell you when she comes. There, you must be quiet, or you will not be able to see her."

"When will it be?" and the tremulous voice was freighted with anxiety.

"At three, this afternoon. Try to compose yourself and be patient."

Margaret turned her face to the wall, and the nurse left her presently. But there was no quiet for the newly-awakened brain. It seemed to her as if the slow moments would never count up their accustomed hours. Like a picture, everything came back to her up to the moment when she had seen Nora flying wildly back to the opposite walk.

The lady made her appearance at last. A sweet, gracious-looking person, hardly of middle age, with one of those finely-modulated, soothing voices.

"Where is the child?" Maggie almost shrieked, so wrought up had her nerves become in the interval. "The little girl who was with me that fatal day?"

"Little girl!" and Mrs. Byington glanced at her in the utmost surprise. "Why, you were quite alone when they picked you up! Oh, surely, it was not your child?" she cried anxiously.

"It was the child of my dead mistress, but as dear to me as my own life. Oh, Nora! Nora! where are you? I must get up and search. Oh, surely, she was not killed!"

"She was not killed; she was not even there, I am quite sure. Could she not find her way home, or to some friend? She could tell where she lived, — or was she too young?"

"She did not know. She had never been in the city

before. I brought her here; I was to wait until we heard from her father. Oh, God help me if she is lost! I shall go crazy."

"Try to calm yourself, and tell me the story," said Mrs. Byington, in a voice that exercised a peculiar power over the sick woman. "We can advertise, you know, and search the police stations. My husband will do everything in his power. We have both regretted the accident so deeply."

"But she may have starved or perished! A little girl barely seven, and so unused to cities. You see I was staying with my cousin, and had been there but two days. Oh, heaven keep her!"

"If you will collect your thoughts and give me a description of the child, we will have advertisements in different papers to-morrow morning. First, had the child any jewelry, or rich clothing?"

"Nothing but a chain and cross that her mother always wore. Her portrait is at my cousin's; if you could see that. Oh, what will Ellen think!"

Margaret Donald broke into an uncontrollable fit of weeping. Mrs. Byington tried to calm her, and at length obtained a somewhat coherent account of the situation, and a description of the child.

"I think she will be easily found," was the reassuring rejoinder. "The name is unusual, and she is old enough to tell her own story. Do not fear, my poor girl, I will drive to your cousin's at once, and explain your disappearance."

"Oh, if you will;" and the wild eyes were raised with an expression of fervent gratitude. "Tell her she will find the locket in a small box, inlaid with pearl, nearly at the bottom of the trunk. It belonged to my dear mistress. Oh, my darling, my child that I loved too well! Have I failed in my trust through that very love?"

"We shall obtain some clue, I am very sure. Strive to be composed and hopeful. You cannot blame yourself, for it seems the result of an almost unavoidable accident in a

crowded street. I know my coachman is one of the most considerate drivers, and yet I feel as if the fault was wholly ours. Depend upon our doing everything in our power."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" said she; and the sad, wistful eyes overflowed with tears.

Sister Agnes was summoned, and she viewed her patient with some alarm.

"I am afraid she will be worse," began the visitor, "but it was absolutely necessary that we should have this conversation. She has a great anxiety to battle with, and everything needful must be done for her. I can only commend her to your care, and the wisdom of God." Then, rising —

"I will be in again to-morrow, as usual, with some good news I hope."

"Drive to East Tenth Street," she said to the coachman as she entered the carriage.

Ellen Brown occupied a floor of a tenement house, in a rather dingy brick row.

"Couldn't I do the errand for you ma'am?" asked Michael. "Perhaps the person would step out."

"No, I must go in. I may stay some fifteen or twenty minutes. It does not look dangerous," and Mrs. Byington smiled.

She picked her way up to the third floor. The place was tolerably clean inside, though the air was close and not over fragrant. Mrs. Brown was at home; a nice, tidy woman, with three little ones.

She had been almost wild with anxiety at her cousin's sudden disappearance. Margaret and the child had only been her guests for three days. She gave a minute description of the child, and together they searched the trunk. The box was soon discovered and inspected.

"What a lovely child!" exclaimed Mrs. Byington, as Ellen opened the locket.

"Indeed she is. That was taken two years ago, but she is hardly as large now as my Teddy, and he isn't six yet. And she's so shy of strangers, the little thing! Why, it will about kill her to be lost," and Mrs. Brown wiped away a tear.

"I must drive around to the police stations at once. There is not a moment to be lost. And now, Mrs. Brown, if you can find the time, I think it will be a good thing for you to come down and see your cousin. I am deeply obliged for your ready assistance."

"Oh, thank you ma'am, don't mention it. I am ready to do anything, and I'm so glad to hear a word from her. Poor John will be mightily relieved."

With a cordial adieu, Mrs. Byington went back to her carriage. From thence, till night, she drove from one station to another, and received telegrams; but no word of any stray child answering her description.

Mr. Byington looked very grave over her tidings, as she detailed them on her return.

"If we could only have known this in the beginning!" he said. "The child may have fallen into bad hands, but I think a liberal reward might bring her to light. We will hope, at least."

Margaret tossed restlessly upon her bed. The fever had returned, but not with any alarming violence. Still her poor brain wandered, and she lived over the past, so recent and so sad. One picture stood out more boldly than the rest, and with the fatal persistence of fever she went over and over the strange incident.

A brilliant June afternoon it was. She had obeyed her mistress' small behests. The funeral expenses were paid, the furniture sold, the two trunks, packed and strapped, standing in the narrow hall. To-morrow they were to go to New York. The girl sat by the open window in a thoughtful mood, while little Nora, tired out with weeping for her dead mamma, lay asleep in the next room.

Margaret was startled by the stopping of a hack before the door. Mechanically she rose and opened it.

"Mrs. Waldeburgh lived here?" the man asserted.

"She did. She is dead. Perhaps you do not know?" and Maggie studied him in vague surprise.

"That's what I told the missus in my hack. But she wanted to see you or some one."

"Very well, if her business is with me."

"It's all right," he exclaimed, nodding toward the hack, and going back assisted his passenger, who stepped to the sidewalk with the air of an empress. A tall, magnificent woman, past middle life perhaps, but still retaining the blooming appearance of youth. Her dark hair was scarcely threaded by silver, her complexion was fresh, and both face and figure preserved the softly rounded contour of beauty. Her hands and feet were exquisite. Maggie remarked the one as she descended the carriage steps, and the other as she held her fan and parasol. Who could she be?

"You are Mrs. Waldeburgh's housekeeper, or maid, or attended her in some capacity?" and the brilliant hazel-eyes startled and fascinated Margaret Donald.

"Yes," she answered, in amazement.

"Then I have found the right person. Driver, come for me in about an hour. Do not fail."

The man touched his hat and sprang up in his seat.

"Will you walk in?" Maggie asked rather timidly.

"Certainly, my good woman, I came on some important business. Are we quite alone?" and she glanced furtively around.

"Yes, except that my little Miss Nora is asleep in the next room."

"Oh!" and a peculiar expression passed over the handsome face. "And who may your Miss Nora be, pray?"

"Mrs. Waldeburgh's little girl;" and Maggie began to eye her visitor askance.

"Ah! What is her age?"

"Seven, but she is quite small. She has been very delicate until the last year or two."

"Are there any more children?"

"No; she lost two little boys with scarlet-fever just before I came to her, about two years ago."

"Do you know anything of the child's father?"

Maggie hesitated. What was to be the result of all this questioning?

"He is not in America, I think. You need not be afraid to speak out. Indeed, you may be perfectly frank with me. I am an old friend of her father's family, and for their sakes I wish to learn a few of the particulars respecting her."

"And you want to take the child!" cried Maggie in affright. "But you cannot. My mistress gave her to me to keep for her father."

"My good woman, do not get alarmed so easily. No one wants the child, so far as I have heard. Perhaps you may know that your mistress married against her father's wishes — was, in fact, disinherited for her disobedience?"

"She had a — stepmother —" and Maggie glanced up timidly.

"Yes." Not a tint of rising color or embarrassment served to fasten Maggie's half-suspicion on the superb woman before her, who fanned herself languidly, filling the air with the pungent perfume of sandal-wood. "But I think that had little to do with it. The man was a penniless adventurer, passing himself off as some German or Italian count —"

"He was a Hungarian," said Maggie, with a kind of sturdy truthfulness.

"It matters little. Miss Grenville might have chosen where she liked. I shall not spend time to argue minor points — she chose in the face of her father's prohibition,

and left her home with this fellow. Indeed, her family do not believe she ever was married."

"But she was! she was!" exclaimed Maggie with an indignant flush. "I have seen her certificate."

"That may be, too," with an imperious gesture of the hand. "Such a thing could easily be forged, you know. Her father would need a witness to convince him of the fact. A few letters passed between them — as I understood it, and I was at that time quite interested in the misguided girl. At different intervals her father has, through his business man, learned that she was not actually suffering. Then he heard that she had been deserted."

"She was not deserted!" exclaimed Maggie angrily. "Her husband was persuaded to return to his native land by an uncle, and there was a fortune coming to him —"

The incredulous smile on the handsome face opposite, embarrassed Maggie.

"And then there was some political trouble."

"Exactly," with a rather derisive nod. "And the gentleman has not returned. Meanwhile, his wife dies — shall I say of a broken heart? We scarcely believe in such things now-a-days."

"She loved him! She had the utmost faith in him. I am to keep the child —"

Maggie studied the face of her visitor. It was high-bred, proud to haughtiness, but quite impassible. Was there some underplot to gain possession of the child?

"I see you do not trust me at all," and the visitor smiled with a fascinating touch of grace and pardon. "I will be still more explicit. Mr. Grenville desired to know just what his daughter's circumstances were, and to give her some aid, unknown. So they consulted me, as I was coming north, and I was shocked, I must admit, when I heard last night of her death. I hope she did not want for anything?"

"She did not," the girl answered shortly.

"And she gave you the child?"

"She did. And though you have no faith in her husband, if you had but seen his letters! He will soon be free, his uncle is working for him. And the little girl will be a great lady."

"You look like a good, trusty girl, and I honor you for being so loyal to your mistress. But I have seen a good deal of the world, and have heard of foreign counts before. Still, I desire to make some provision for the child, and I should feel much more assured if you would promise to keep it yourself!"

Margaret Donald stared in surprise.

"You see," she said in a kind of candid and confidential manner, lowering the bewildering voice a tone or two — "you see Mr. Grenville would never receive her, never! He is the proudest and most exclusive gentleman I have ever met. Then, too, he has other grandchildren who will be his heirs. His health is very delicate and fragile, and all exciting or perplexing matters are kept from him by his physician's command. So I should feel quite empowered to put the child in some good orphan-asylum, or home, unless I knew she was with a reliable person. I do believe you love her. Now, if you were but married!"

"I have been married, ma'am. My husband deserted me, and my little girl. She would have been just as old as Miss Nora. She died before I came to live with Mrs. Waldeburgh."

"Then the way is clear. Now I want you to promise me if you should never hear from the child's father you will adopt her as your own. On that condition I will pay over to you a sum of money, my own free gift, for I shall never mention it to her grandfather."

Maggie glanced up in astonishment.

"Yes, I am convinced that I shall leave her in good hands. I am a quick reader of faces. Now, if you will

sign a paper to this effect I will pay over to you — let me see — twelve hundred dollars.”

“I would do it without a penny, indeed I would, ma’am. I’d work until I dropped, for Miss Nora. Sometimes I think I love her as if she was my own.”

“Give me a pen,” the lady commanded, in an imperious manner.

With that she drew off her glove, displaying two magnificent diamond rings, and one heavy band of plain gold that might have been a wedding-ring.

“There!” she exclaimed, “read this. ‘You promise to keep the child, to adopt her, to bring her up to some useful calling, and bind yourself never to send her back to her grandfather. If her father should return, the money is yours. If you break your promise, in any one respect, I shall feel at liberty to sue you for the money I have paid, and punish you to the extent of the law. And if you should die, the child is to be sent to an asylum.’”

Maggie read the paper over carefully. There was nothing that could possibly work harm to Nora. She seemed under some strange spell, and the thought gave her a thrill of delight that if Nora’s father never should return, Nora would be hers, her own darling!

She signed the paper, she even sealed her promise on the Bible.

“And now can you tell me where the little boys died?”

“At Rochester. They were living in the city then. Mr. Waldeburgh was teaching music. They were younger than Miss Nora.”

The visitor made this entry in a dainty gold-clasped memorandum.

“And now, since Nora’s fate is positively fixed, I think it is hardly worth while for Mr. Grenville to know of her existence. Sometime, when he is strong enough to endure the tidings, it might be as well to inform him of the death of his daughter and her two children. Her grandfather

would never receive Nora, he hated her father so bitterly, and he could not forgive his daughter for thus preferring a stranger and an adventurer. Here is your money. Be careful that you are not robbed of it."

She counted out ten crisp bank-notes, of fifty dollars each, five of one hundred, and the rest in smaller denominations. Maggie's eyes dilated. She had never handled so much money before in her life. And surely it was an honest gain.

"You have inspired me with a great deal of confidence. Only be true to your trust, and kind to the poor little thing. There, the hack has come;" and the lady rose.

"Would you not like to see Miss Nora?"

"I have hardly a moment. Well — yes."

Maggie led the way. Nora was in the charming sleep of childhood, and beautiful as a cherub. The girl stole a furtive glance at the other's face. It hardly evinced curiosity.

"Quite a pretty little thing. I am sure you will be a good mother to her. Good-by. I trust your promise implicitly."

She picked her way daintily through the little courtyard, entered the hack, and was driven away.

Margaret watched her out of sight. The summer sunshine lay warm around; birds were singing, and the south wind stirred the branches idly. Was she dreaming?

Here on the table lay the money. How strange the whole episode appeared! The lady surely could not have any designs against Nora; indeed, it was evident the Grenvilles cared nothing for the child.

Margaret had lived through her own bitter romance. The man she had loved, trusted, and married, proved to be the husband of another woman. Her little girl had been snatched from her after a brief illness. When she had come to live with Mrs. Waldeburgh, that lady's husband was already in Europe. For eighteen months he had not

made his appearance; was there really such a person in existence? Or rather was she a true and lawful wife? Ladies were sometimes deceived in this matter, as well as poor girls. And if her own father doubted the marriage —

“Maggie, Maggie!” called a sweet voice from the adjoining chamber.

She worshipped the child. A subtle temptation stole into her soul. If she could have her for hers, alone! If the bird-like voice would learn, presently, to say “mamma” to her, and a thrill of rapture filled her being. She had promised, and if Nora’s father never came, — yes, this beautiful little creature would be hers. There was no one else in the world to care for it.

“My darling! my darling!” she cried, clasping Nora to her heart.

“I want mamma, Maggie. Why must she stay in heaven always?”

“Because it is God’s will, my darling. I am to be your mamma now, kiss me.”

She slipped down from the bed, out of her nurse’s tender embrace, and stood there grave and sad, and said, with most unchildlike firmness,

“Maggie, you can never be my mamma, never.”

CHAPTER III.

TIM CHAFNEY'S PRIZE.

"**HERE**," said Tim Chafney. "It ain't hardly fit for a little lady like you, but mebbe it's best. Anyhow, it's where I live. Up these stairs — you're so tired I'd better carry you, I guess."

Nora made no demur. She was still sobbing, and the paroxysms seemed to rend her slight frame; but she had ceased to weep tears, and was too much exhausted to object to anything.

She had wandered on in terror and bewilderment until she had reached the festering purlicus of the east side. A few brick tenements reared their lofty heads, and were crowded with human beings, but the larger part were old, tumble-down shanties, or houses that had once been quite respectable but were now given over to greed of landlords, and the huddling together of miserable wretches.

It was one of the last that Tim Chafney entered, and it still showed some traces of its former grandeur. The stairs were wide, the ceilings high, and the windows capacious. But the floors were a mass of grease and dirt, the walls were smoked and smeared. To the front room on the second floor he carried his burden, having a key of his own to fit the door.

There was a tumbled bed in one corner, a few chairs, a table with the remnants of breakfast, a rusty stove in the fireplace, surmounted by a much-banged teakettle and two flat-irons. The air was close and foul, the sun had shone in the windows all day long, leaving it hotter than ever.

Nora gave one glance around, then, shivering with disgust, clung to Tim and cried out :

"Oh, take me away, take me away! I can't stay here in this —"

"Well, where 'll I take you?" the boy asked, roughly. "You wouldn't go to the Station — oh, jiminy! what's to pay now?"

Exhausted and overcome, nature had suddenly given way. Fainting-fits were not new in Tim's experience, though they were generally preceded by some well-directed blow. The child was more manageable now. He laid her on the bed, ran for a pitcher of water, and bathed her face, touching her long hair with a kind of awe, its color and texture were so wondrously beautiful.

"Will you look at the clothes!" he said to himself. "That's *swell* toggery. And light kid boots! She's somebody's young 'un, I know. Now, if her dad, or any of her folks, would do the han'some —"

She drew a long sigh, and opened her eyes.

"I am so tired, so tired! And my feet ache dreadfully. Is this your house?"

"Yes."

Tim Chafney blushed with a feeling compounded of shame and mortification.

"It's my guv'ner's, an' Mother Mell's. You see my mammy she died too, and then dad married Kelsey's Bet; but she run off with Long Joe, went to Californy, we heerd; and then he took Mother Mell. T'other room's mine, in there;" and he nodded toward the door with his head. "I sell papers, and do odd jobs," and a broad grin illumined his face.

"Could I have a drink?"

He rinsed the coffee-grounds out of a cup and filled it with water. She drank it eagerly, then attempted to rise, but fell back again.

"You're clean beat out, you see," he explained. "Now

I'll tell you what I'll do. You jest lay here, and I'll fix up my room a bit. You've been used to better fare, I know; but mebbe you can make it do till to-morrow. And then I'll find Maggie."

"Oh, if you only will!" she exclaimed, imploringly.

"You may bet your life I'll have her, if she is to be found. But see here! Where's your daddy?"

She looked at him in momentary confusion.

"My papa is — ever so far off, across the ocean, in Germany. Oh, my feet do ache so! Can't you take off my shoes?"

Tim became a willing lady's-maid, though he was somewhat clumsy.

Poor little feet! They throbbed and burned like fire. The pain absolutely brought tears to her eyes.

Tim went to prepare his room. It was not very large, being at the head of the hall, and contained a cot and an old-fashioned chest of drawers. A dilapidated comfortable was thrown over the bed, and the straw pillow had no case. A dim sense of neatness and propriety struggled through his thick brain. He might creep into his kennel like a dog, but this pretty little girl —

"I'll sweep up a bit first. An' I s'pose she has sheets and things on her bed;" and thereat Tim gave his shaggy chestnut curls a dig. "If Mother Mell didn't come home drunk, but she will, and mebbe the gruv'n'r 'll be a little high — oh, I'll jest ask Ann Rooney!"

He ran up on the next floor, and told his story over briefly.

"The saints be praised! It's not lyin' that ye are, Tim?" and the round, rosy, Irish face, with its keen blue eyes, was turned full upon him.

"Come and see for yourself, then. Come down do, and mebbe you can tell me what to do with her. I'll hunt her folks up to-morrow, an' if I get a reward I'll go you shares, Ann Rooney, so I will."

Nothing doubting now, the woman followed him. Sure enough, there lay the pale little waif on the bed, and her tired face went to the motherly heart at once.

"The poor lamb! And it's lost ye are? No, don't go to cryin'. I wouldn't hurt a hair o' yer head. And Tim here's goin' to make a nice bed for yer; but yez must have a bite and sup, and a cup o' tay."

"I'd like to get her fixed afore Mother Mell comes in. There's no tellin' —"

"Ye'r right, there, honey!" and Mrs. Rooney gave a sly wink out of her eyes. "The misthress may have a drop too much of some'at stronger'n tea. And the sheets, ye said?"

She ran off after them. Spreading the ragged comfortable over the cot, she covered it with a sheet, and then rejoined Tim.

"An' now, if ye didn't mind, I might be afther undressin' the poor lamb. Will ye come to me, honey? I've a little gal half yer size in height, but she'd make two of ye in the body. Now will ye tell me about yer folks, and where they are? Tim 'll find 'em for ye to-morrow."

Nora began with her story, but in a few moments she was again in a fit of violent hysterical crying, and became almost unmanageable. Mrs. Rooney coaxed and soothed, and after having disrobed her, laid her between the clean sheets.

"An' now a good cup o' tay 'll settle her narves, I'm thinkin'. Poor lamb! Ye can't go to night, ye know. Wait till the morrer and Maggie 'll be there a huntin' for ye. An' Tim, I might jist rub out her frock to-night, an' her little stockings, that are like a cobweb with fineness, and she'll be fresh as a rose in the mornin'. Now don't cry any more, me little darlin', an' the holy mother 'll bring it all out right for such a swate little thing. She looks like an angel now, that she does, Tim; an' the saints 'll re-

member the good deed agin ye, Tim, when yer goin' through purgatory."

Tim gave a cheerful laugh, and dropped on the floor by the bedside. There was a hurrying and scurrying through the house, shrill voices scolding, coarse voices swearing, and noisy children filling in the pauses. Now and then Nora started up, her eyes dilating in wild terror, but the boy soothed and explained, and watched her curiously. A strange sense of her power and superiority seemed to grow upon him, and he felt coarse and clumsy by contrast.

Mrs. Rooney came presently with the tea and a bit of bread and butter, but the taste of both sickened Nora.

"Try to feed her, Tim. The old man's home, makin' a row about supper, an' I must go. But I'll be back agin prisently."

Tim took surreptitious swallows of the tea and nibbles of the bread, since Nora would have none of it. Then he brought in the part of a loaf left from breakfast, and munched it while he tried to comfort the child with promises of finding Maggie "easy." The daylight waned, and at last the poor tired little girl fell asleep. Ann Rooney, busy with her old man and the childers', stole a few moments at last to "run down a bit."

"It's glad I am that she's asleep, the poor lamb. If ye can but find her folks, Tim, for they're not the common kind I'm thinking. An' hasn't Mother Mell come home yet?"

"No, an' I'm thankful that she's kept away. But I'd like to take a bit of a run down the street, if you wouldn't mind watchin' a little. Mebbe 'twould be best to lock the door?"

"Yes, indeed. Hand me the key thin, for I hear Dennis callin', an' its a drop too much he's had, so I must run."

Tim drew a long breath of relief, and straightway proceeded to invest a little loose change in some peanuts.

The sidewalks were filling up fast, children were swarming on the stoops and in alley-ways, followed here and there by shrieking viragoes, who dealt blows and curses alike generously.

It was past midnight when Tim returned. Mother Mell had tumbled into bed to sleep off a drunken debauch. Nora tossed and tumbled and muttered incoherently, but had not been entirely awake. Tim dropped into a corner of the hall, with a pile of rags for a pillow, and slept soundly.

Instead of being off with the lark, Tim hung around the next morning until Mother Mell roused herself: a tall, handsome, hard looking woman of thirty-five, with large, bold, black eyes, and jetty hair, but whose face showed evident marks of dissipation and coarseness. Tim had his story to tell, and her sympathy to bespeak until he could find the child's natural protectors. She nodded an indifferent assent, and then asked if his father came home last evening. Then Tim ran up stairs to make matters straight with Mrs. Rooney, and was off for a few speculations, as he considered himself a rather shrewd business man.

Nora woke in a strange place, to find herself more alone, and if possible more terrified than on the previous evening. Coming from the pretty, clean little town, and a mother's exquisite care, this hole filled her with dismay, sickened her. The filthy, crowded street, the horrible scents, the screams and confusion, the sound of children being beaten, or quarrelling among themselves, turned the little brain almost wild. In vain Mrs. Rooney tried to comfort her, and took her up-stairs to play with the childer. She shrank from every face and touch, cried first for Maggie, and then for Tim. Her little feet were so swollen and blistered that she could not even put on her shoes, and Mrs. Rooney had dressed her in a checked apron until her small gown was ready.

Tim, meanwhile, had carried several baskets and traveling satchels, and worked his way over to Broadway, where he made inquiries, first of all of a policeman. But the man had heard nothing of a lost child, or a woman named Maggie, and treated the whole story as "gammon." So he had no good news for the little waif.

"But if you can walk to-morrow, I'll take you over," he said encouragingly, "you may find just the place. There, don't cry my little beauty. See, I've brought you home some cakes. It'll be all right to-morrow, never you mind."

Mother Mell looked askance at the child, but Mrs. Rooney kept her mostly under her protecting wing; for though she was poor, and had a drunken brute of a husband, her heart was large and tender. Tim, with a shrewd eye to business, and future reward, stood between her and harm. Gentleman Chaffy, as Tim's father was called, made a few advances, which so frightened Nora that she ran and hid in Mrs. Rooney's dress.

A big, handsome bully was gentleman Chaffy, with the figure of a prize-fighter, and a face that might have been painted for a gladiator when it was not disfigured by debauch. What he did for a livelihood might have been a mystery. In this neighborhood of thieves and beggars no one questioned. Sometimes he had plenty of money, at others he wrung Tim's scanty sixpences out of his pockets. He was coarsely jolly and sullenly brutal by turns. The street, as a general thing, stood in awe of him, for his fist was like a sledge-hammer. Even Mother Mell, with all her courage and audacity, found it hard to cope with the ruffian; yet, in her way, she not only adored him, but was proud of his brute ferocity.

So passed two days for unhappy little Nora. Tim studied the papers, but there was no flaming advertisement, or extravagant reward offered. The child did not absolutely starve, though she sickened at the coarse food and untidy tables. She was no favorite with the children, who

were sturdy street-gamins, with democratic tendencies, and took every occasion to jeer and torment. On the morning of the third day Tim delighted her with the announcement that he would take her out with him to find Maggie. Mrs. Rooney put on her dainty boots and her white dress, and kissed her with much affection.

"Sure I'd take ye myself, honey, if I could, for ye'r a swate darlin', but Dennis wouldn't hear to robbin' the children, an' it's little enough we get onyhow. So I hope ye'll hear 'bout ye'r Maggy, an' there's a good-by kiss. Ye's too nice for the likes of this hole, an' ye've been used to somethin' better; so the holy Virgin go wid ye, alanna."

Alas! after a weary, weary search, Tim brought her home at night. They had asked in stores, inquired of apple-women, boot-blacks, and numerous corner venders, even at the police station. And then it occurred to shrewd Tim that the child had been lost purposely.

Mother Mell was in a tantrum that evening. Her black eyes flashed fire, her cheeks were in a flame, her voice loud and shrill. She had been quarrelling with one of the neighbors, and as Tim entered opened upon him.

"What d'y bring that beggar's brat back here for?" she screamed. "I ain't goin' to have the trollopin' huzzy round here with her white dress and her fine, whinin' ways. It's all a lie about her, Tim Chaffy, an' ye knowd it well enough from the first! She ain't got no folks. Take her off to the station. I won't have her eatin' honest folks out of house an' home. Clear out, or I'll bang both ye'r heads off!"

"What's all that row, old woman?" said a voice in the doorway, and Tim's father stood behind the frightened child.

"I ain't found her folks yet," responded Tim, "an' she don't want to go to the station."

"She hain't got no folks, I tell you, an' she best to be sent up to the Island right off. We ain't got nothin' to waste on beggar's brats!"

"Shet ye'r head!" said Gentleman Chaffy, with a sudden rush of paternal indulgence. "Tim shall keep the gal if he likes. An' I'll 'dopt her, too. Come my little lass, will ye take me for a daddy? Who knows but some day I'll hev a coach-an'-four to put ye in!" and he laughed loudly. "Anyhow, ye shall have a bed an' a bite till ye'r big enough an' han'some enough to do for yerself, an' it won't be long, nuther," with a kind of wicked leer. "So, Mell, yu'll jest consider yerself mammy to a likely gal, that ye didn't have to nuss from a screechin' brat. An' now, old woman, let's hear no more o' yer jaw."

"You mean to take — to keep that gal!" and the woman was foaming with passion.

Gentleman Chaffy cared nothing for the child. Whatever tender feelings he might have had, had been blunted long ago by rum and brutality. But in some moods he liked to torment Mell, to show her that fierce and high as her temper was he could be her master. There had been several encounters in which her lord and master had left the marks of his authority, and her servitude, and now this whim had taken him.

"Yes," he answered, "I mean to keep the child. She'll be a nice mate for Tim, here."

Mell gauged his eyes. She loved Gentleman Chaffy in her strange, tigerish fashion, and the few women who had dared to come between had suffered for their temerity, in her unreasoning jealousy. But she knew now if she began any open assault she would surely get the worst of it, and her enemy be exalted in triumph. Yet she so hated the child at that moment, she could have torn her limb from limb.

Her face flushed with an angry purple, and she gave a loud, shrill laugh.

"Upon my word we're quite swells! 'Doptin' gals and all that! Well, I hope yer darter'll be good to yer in yer old age. What yer starin' for, Tim? Didn't yer hear

what yer gen'rous par was sayin' ? Come, sissy, take off yer hâ, and make yerself ter hum. 'Tisn't every day a little gal gets a par an' mar, and a brother Tim."

Gentleman Chaffy looked hard at her.

"None o' yer blasted tricks, Mell," he said, "or I'll break every bone in yer han'some body, and make yer such a pile yer best friends wouldn't know yer."

Mell understood that discretion was the better part of wisdom. For that matter she had learned it by the very hardest. So she gave another loud laugh.

"Come in, all hands," she said with an attempt at merriment. "We'll have a sort o' party on that. Tim, run out and get some ale and some cheese, and mebbe sissy would like some cake an' strawb'ries. Yer par'll stan' treat, I know. He allers does the han'sum thing!"

But she was hardly prepared to see her husband take a bill from his pocket and hand it to Tim.

"Mebbe I'd better go," she said.

"No yer won't, nuther. You'll stay hum and bile the kettle, Polly. Come, my little lass, let's hear all this story 'bout yer gittin' lost."

He coaxed Nora on his knee, while Mell gave her a vengeful glance. With Tim's aid, after he returned, the story was told over quite coherently.

"She's a swell kid, as ye can see," said Tim, with a very knowing air, "but her par may be one of those precious old flummers that's in plays an' stories, and mebbe the gal didn't know just what to do with her, 'n left her in the street. I've tried my level best to git on the lay, but there don't seem no track. And so's yer willin' to keep her, I'll help, too. She's purty 'nough to sell flowers and all that, and she kin soon help to airn her own livin'."

The boy's vernacular was almost like an unknown tongue to the child, but she understood that her home was to be here for the present, and that there had been some doubt thrown upon Maggie. Her heart swelled within her, but

she did not dare to give way to tears, and it seemed to her almost unthankful. Could she not find her way over to Broadway, and watch every day, without bothering any one?

There was a place in Gentleman Chaffy's heart that the little girl touched that night. She made him think of his honest, simple, country boyhood, and of one golden-haired lass, the squire's daughter, who was queen of the place, and whom every great boy worshipped. It brought back pictures of green fields and babbling brooks, of fragrant smells, fruit-blossoms, haying time, and harvest days, and he sat there until the child fell asleep, when he laid her down softly on Tim's bed. There was a light in his face Mell had never seen there.

All the cruel hate of the woman's soul was aroused. It was not sufficient to know that this was a passing fancy, that in a week's time he might treat her to the same liberal allowance of kicks and cuffs that he occasionally showered upon Tim, that she might be able to beat her by and by, to despoil her of that golden hair, to brown and harden the fair skin by exposure, to starve almost, to degrade — it all passed through her mind — she knew the history of girls and women so well. And what if it were months before she dared to wreak this vengeance! To see her petted — a girl, a woman — by his hand!

He had thrown himself on the bed, and was sleeping heavily. When had he ever staid in-doors before? Tim was not home yet. She stole in the hall room and looked at the child. A ray of moonlight fell across the bed; strange and out of place it looked in that den of vileness. Outside, the garish street-lamps and flaming kerosene disputed every inch, and made a sickly, hideous glare, more fit for the street orgies.

A week had wrought a great change in Elsinore. She was thinner, paler, the eyes a little sunken, and blue under-

neath, and the sweet mouth drawn with tense lines. Yet in that dingy bed it was the face of a cherub.

She came closer. Mell Chafney, and her long, bony fingers clutched each other. How easily she could strangle her, that white throat was so little! There was murder in the woman's eye, a jealous fury, and yet something that was not conscience withheld her.

I'd be a fool to try Sing-Sing for that brat!" and she gave a low, scornful laugh. "Oh, my beauty, if yer were a few years older I'd punish yer mug so's no man'd ever want to make love to yer. And *he's* as good as done it, drat him! D'yer think yer could set in his lap and be coddled, and me a lookin' on an' sayin' nothin'? I'll show yer!"

Then she paused suddenly. "Mell Chafney, yer a fool," she said, "all along o' yer jealousy. Yer kin do better'n that, and git rid o' her without a word. Yes, an' I'll do it, too. Yer race is run in this place, my fine swell! Afore I'm much older ye'll find some one who isn't Maggie, nuther, and we'll see 'bout 'doptin' gals, Chaffy, that we will."

But Nora slept on, innocent of danger.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST LINK.

"OUR best plan," said Mr. Byington, drawing on his gloves, "will be to make inquiries in the vicinity of Broadway and City Hall. Some one must have seen the child. Doubtless the policeman will be able to tell us."

"I went to the station, and no lost child had been brought in," his wife replied, with a perplexed face. "But I would ask everywhere; and you will have the advertisements inserted immediately."

"Yes. Go and see the poor thing again to-day, and if I hear anything important I will send a messenger at once."

Mr. Byington's first call was at the drug-store. Not learning anything, he continued his search, taking in, as Tim had, various street-peddlers. They were quite sure they had seen a little girl, but their stories were utterly wild and unreliable. Then he sought out a policeman,—the one who had assisted after the accident.

"A lost child!" and the man put on a thoughtful, puzzled air. "Why, no, I do not remember any one asking for the woman. There was a little stray boy that I took to the station three or four days ago. About a fortnight, this must be."

"She must have been a very noticeable and beautiful child; very fair, with long golden hair, dressed in white, with a black sash-ribbon. This is a portrait of her."

"Seems to me I've seen that face before. But then so many pretty children with golden hair go up and down Broadway, that one almost wonders where all the plain

women come from. You might see McBride; his beat is just up above. He may have heard."

So to McBride Mr. Byington went, and the story was told over again. There had been several strays in the past fortnight, but none appeared to answer the description.

Mr. Byington turned, quite discouraged. It seemed strange that any human being could disappear so entirely, and he looked back wistfully.

"What was the woman's name?" asked McBride.

"Margaret Donald."

"And she had the child in charge? See here, now, I do remember a bit of something. There was a boy about here, a reg'lar street Arab, asking about a woman named Maggie, and one day he brought a little girl, — why, maybe this is the scent of the game. He was in rags, and seems to me she *was* pretty. I didn't charge my mind, you know, but told 'em they'd better go to the station;" and the man's face lighted up with interest.

"A child of seven or so?"

"She was a little tot. I rather suspected he was on some lay, and the girl was a kind of decoy-duck. But the name being similar —"

"And you did not question them?"

"No. A pretty pack of lies I'd have stored in my mind if I questioned every youngster. I could not know anything about them, and I never connected the child with the woman who was hurt. Where did the girl go that day?"

"She was frightened, and ran away before the accident. Should you know the boy again?"

"Well, I can't say. He was a sharp-looking youngster, and they travel all over. Beatty must have seen them, I think."

"Keep a sharp look-out for them, if they should come in this direction again."

With that Mr. Byington went back to Beatty, who was

gallantly piloting a bevy of damsels across the street. In the first leisure moment he questioned him, and found that he, too, remembered two children, who had been inquiring about a woman named Maggie.

"Strange I didn't think of them before, but then they were not like ordinary stray children. The boy fooled about here two or three days, and was pretty impudent, so I rather mistrusted the whole story."

The questioner gave a sigh of disappointment. To come so near — and yet it was something to hear that the child was alive, and desirous of finding her natural protector.

"I shall advertise, and I want you to keep a sharp look-out for the boy. If they only had left any clue! Here is my address; so if you should learn anything, let me know at once."

Mrs. Byington waited until quite late that day before she went to the hospital. The little news that she could take was cheering.

"I think the child has fallen into the hands of some friendly people," she said, soothingly. "We shall hear soon, no doubt. They would produce her for the sake of the reward, if nothing else." Keep up good heart, my poor girl."

Maggie was not so well that day. The unrest of the night previous had brought on a slight return of the fever. Her mental vision had been so distorted that she could hardly separate the dreams from the reality. And with it all, a sense of torturing, passionate love, — the love that had led her to desire Nora for her own.

All that night, after her strange visitor's departure, she had turned it over in her mind. Her dead mistress had left word for her simple furniture to be sold; her clothes and jewels packed for her child. With these and the few hundred dollars, Maggie was to go to New York, and wait

until some tidings came. When Mrs. Waldeburgh had been left by her husband, she little dreamed their parting would be final. If he could be successful in proving his rights,—which must be done during the life of his uncle,—they would be placed far above the reach of the poverty they had struggled with so cheerfully. His arrest had proved a terrible shock to her; and then, for the first time, she suspected her dangerous malady. She battled against it bravely; perhaps it would have been better if she had yielded a little. But she had eked out their small income by lessons in music and singing, and she felt impelled to continue them until it was too late. Even then she could not bear to add to her husband's anxiety until she found death staring her in the face. With the same steady courage she made all arrangements, and it was the answer to this last sad letter that Margaret was to await, and be guided by. And it was curious, now, how a doubt crept into the mind of the trusty girl.

The next day they said adieu to the few sincere friends. A wearisome and anxious journey it proved to one so unaccustomed to travelling; but at last Maggie found herself and her belongings deposited safely in the cousin's home, and met with a warm reception from Ellen, who had not seen her since her unfortunate desertion.

To Ellen Brown she confided a part of her strange trust. Of the money she did not speak.

"It's a curious story," said Ellen. "And you never saw the child's father?"

"No. There are several pictures of him, and there is the marriage certificate and the letters. I can't doubt, for all that handsome old woman was so sure."

"She *was* married, I think. But will he ever come back after the child? Men do such queer things in this world, Margaret. The ground isn't good enough for you to walk on at first, and they'd fairly fling themselves under your feet, but after a while you can walk by yourself, and buy

your own shoes in the bargain. She is a pretty little thing. Shall you take her, Maggie?"

"Indeed I will. Do you know I could almost find it in my heart to wish—no, I don't mean that, but I love her so. It's just like my own she seems, Ellen, and I'd keep her gladly."

"But there's next to nothing for her."

"As if I should mind that! I'd not grudge any work for her;" with a bright, cordial smile.

"Her heart's so set upon her own mother, though. And she seems such a proud little thing. It would be hard, Maggie, to waste your time and money upon her, and then have her turn and flout you."

"She would understand when she was older."

"But I can't help thinking that it is a great risk, and even blood kin are not always thankful. Yet you are right to do your whole duty by her, and she is nearer for the little one you lost."

She was an imperious little queen, this Nora, although warm-hearted and tender. But there was a difference between her and the chubby, common-place young Browns. Margaret coaxed, and tried to buy the concession of being called mamma. But Nora was firm in her refusal, though often pained by it herself, as Maggie could see. She grew daily more beautiful to the eyes of her partial nurse, who coveted entire possession with a deep, ardent passion. Margaret was an expert needle-woman, and already she had planned for herself a home in some pretty suburb, where she could establish herself and earn an honorable living, and bring up her little daughter. For when Nora was old enough to understand the facts of the case how could she be otherwise than grateful?

Thus had passed a few days in the city. Once Margaret had gone down to the shipping-house where the letters were to be sent. Not that she expected one so soon, but she wanted to make some inquiries about Mr. Waldeburgh.

To her great surprise the clerk knew absolutely nothing, and asked her sharply, as if he considered her an impostor, if she was sure there was any such person.

The child delighted to be dressed and taken out on Broadway. On the morning of the accident Maggie had been shopping a little, buying parcels of fruit, and various small matters, and had designed to cross Broadway and take a Third Avenue car, with what fateful result the reader knows.

And as she tossed upon her bed, all these memories haunted Margaret Donald with the most poignant anguish. If she had not so coveted the child — ah, was it God's swift punishment? She had failed in her trust to her dead mistress; in her arrogance and ambition the treasure had slipped out of her hands.

Was it true they had found some trace of her? Oh, if she were only well! If she could begin and search the great city, she felt sure she could succeed.

Meanwhile the city grew hotter, and one after another flitted to some country or sea-side resort. Mrs. Byington, whose arrangements had been made some time before, delayed day after day, pitying Margaret's distress and searching for the child. Armed with the picture, she visited homes and institutions for stray children. Now and then a face almost assured her that she had found the object of her inquiries, but the story would prove it a failure. Nothing had come of the advertisement, though a liberal reward had been offered.

The Byingtons were sitting over their dinner one evening. The day had been melting; but now a pleasant breeze was wafted from the park, and wandered in at the spacious windows, a welcome guest.

"It is hardly worth while to delay your journey any longer," Mr. Byington was saying. "The search for the child will continue, and the woman will get well, and now

I do not see that either can be forwarded greatly by your remaining. And really, you are looking quite careworn."

"Am I?" and she smiled. "To tell the truth, I have been intensely interested. Margaret seems such a faithful girl, and her devotion as well as her sufferings have touched me keenly."

"But George and Lawrence were to meet you at Montreal, you know. You would have barely time if you started to-morrow. And I think that would be best. The girl sits up, you say, and is surely recovering?"

"A message for you, sir," announced the butler, handing it to his master.

Mr. Byington broke it open. He was as anxious about Nora as his wife could possibly be.

"Good news! They have found the boy, and have him at the station. Isn't this queer? 'He refuses to admit where the child really is, but confesses that he found her. Come immediately.' Perhaps the young rascal is holding off for a larger reward. I think I can bring him to terms."

"Oh, Edward!" and Mrs. Byington rose. "Let me see the message. Found! Oh, the little darling! I am wild with impatience to see her. Edward, I have been thinking — but you *will* have her brought here!"

"Alice, do not excite yourself so," and he took her trembling hand. "Yes, the child shall come here as soon as we get possession of her."

"And can we not send to the hospital? Poor Margaret looked at me so wistfully to-day that my heart ached for her."

"We may be a little premature, my dear;" and he smiled tenderly into the fond eyes.

"But if they have found the boy? Oh, think how sweetly she would sleep! No, I cannot keep the blessed news from her a moment."

"You are eager as a child. Have your own way then.

And now will you order in the dessert? I must start as soon as I can."

She dispatched a servant first to the Hospital. How strange that she should feel so interested in this child, who was really nothing to her!

"I suppose you will not start to-morrow? Had you not better write to the boys to-night? Let me see, — tell them to remain until we come; for we must get off speedily."

She did not linger over the table when he had gone. She went to her room, took off her elegant silken dinner-dress, and donned a soft, white wrapper, full of dainty plaitings and laces, that gave her slender figure an air of girlishness. Then she seated herself at her desk. There before her lay the portrait of Elsinore, with its childish grace and witchery. What was there in it that so entranced her? All her married life she had longed for a daughter. Three sons had been born to her, two of whom were living. And if this child were fatherless, as well as motherless, — ah, and she drew a long breath, as if she had seen a vision. A little girl to dress and kiss and train; to hear soft-voiced prayers; to be coaxed with rare, girlish sweetness; to be caressed with soft hands; to have a daughter growing up by one's side; to live all one's life over again in her successes, her marriage, her children! Maggie had not dreamed it so glowingly, but the two women were not so far apart in their longings.

Her head dropped on her hand, and she still studied the picture. No common child was this; you could see birth and breeding in every line. And so she wrote no letter, nor even stirred until her husband's step and voice roused her, and she glanced up with a tender smile.

CHAPTER V.

MOTHER MELL'S STRATAGEM.

WHAT gentleman Chafney's business really was seldom appeared on the surface. He had no trade or situation. Sometimes money was plenty with him, sometimes not. Occasionally he was away for a week or so, coming home flush and good-natured, or penniless and in the mood of a tiger, and being half drunk for days. People in this locality did not inquire too closely about their neighbors' business. Now and then a thief, or a burglar, or a receiver of stolen goods, or even a murderer, was brought out of some den, and no one was surprised. Children lost their childlike attributes, women became either slaves or fiends, and dropped into graves unremarked. It might have been leagues away from civilization, and yet luxury was its next-door neighbor. So do extremes meet in great cities.

For Nora, every breath was terror. The denizens of the street filled her with wildest alarm, and the halls and stairs were thronged with a continual procession of strange faces. Ann Rooney gave her a little motherly care, — coarse, yet with a certain tenderness. Mother Mell knocked her about, and Tim was away most of the time. Indeed, she was a kind of white elephant on the lad's hands. She knew no slang, she could not laugh at the rough fun, she cried, and begged him continually to find Maggie; while he, in his shrewd way, began to fancy the child purposely set adrift in a great city. He would get no reward, and his step-mother scolded at his bringing home the good-for-nothing helpless brat.

He was amazed at his father's sudden fancy for her.

Just now the elder Chafney had plenty of money, and was jolly accordingly. The child had awakened some long-slumbering chord, and though his attempts were rough and clumsy, the evident affection won Nora. When she came out of her chamber and found herself greeted with a smile, she sprang to his side and seized his hand.

Mother Mell turned quickly and glared at her.

"Come, none o' that, old woman!" he said sternly; "yer ought'er be proud o' yer han'sum darter."

"She's no darter o' mine, I'll let yer know! . An' if yer mean to keep the beggar's brat" —

"Well, I do. Ef you've got anything to say agin it say it all now. Never you fear, chicken," to Nora. "Come, out with it."

She gave a loud, forced laugh, and turned away. She had carried the marks of her husband's fist before now, and to-day she had no mind for a bruised or swollen face. Beside, she could take a better revenge than that.

"Tain't every gal that gets as good a daddy, an' I hope she'll be grateful and turn out well. But I've got no money for breakfast. What 'll you have?"

He flung the money across the table, and told her to suit herself. While she was gone, Nora began to tidy-up the room and wash the dishes left from the night before. Gentleman Chaffy watched her with a curious interest.

"She's too nice for this place, an' Mell an' me," he thought. "She ought'er be a lady. If I could put her to school, or in some good home — there's enough shameless devils now a'thout her being dragged down with them, and she'll be a main han'sum gal. An' I'd like to see her now an' then, and feel that she'd care a little about what I'd be a doin' for her. Mell 'ill never like her, that's sure. Twon't do for her to try any of her tricks when I'm round, but she would be a very devil on the sly."

She entered at that moment and amazed him by praising

Nora, who glanced up timidly, and then proceeded with the breakfast.

"I hope yer don't 'xpect me to stay in the house all the while and nuss yer darter, do yer?" she asked with a coarse laugh. "'Cause I want to go up-town a spell this mornin'."

The new father was much relieved at hearing this. Perhaps Mell wouldn't take it so hard after all.

"I'll wash the dishes for you," said Nora, brightly, for even to her the sky seemed clearing.

"Thank'ee," and Mell nodded. "I'm glad to see yer willin' to help yer mammy."

Nora flushed, and hung her head. Would she be compelled to call this coarse woman mamma? If she could but find Maggie she would be willing now to give her the endearing title, but Mother Mell was too terrible to love. And then the tears filled her eyes.

Mell dressed herself in her best finery and went off, her husband walking with her to the corner.

Nora crept up stairs once. Ann Rooney was washing, and not in a very good humor. The baby was asleep, the other two children in the street. But the dirty sidewalk and noisy crowd had no charm for her, so she sat down by the window, and looked at the dense rows of houses. Would she ever have courage to start by herself and find Broadway, and look the long day through for Maggie?

The intense, awful loneliness of the child is hardly to be described. So tenderly kept heretofore, so delicately reared and housed, and used to the most exquisite cleanliness, that this was hourly martyrdom. For although wealth and its surroundings had not been her portion, there had been no hard, grinding poverty, and the little cottage home had been a nest of beauty and fragrance, such as taste and industry can create for itself. She tried to interest herself in a pictorial paper, then she watched

the people from the window, and at last Tim made his appearance, and treated her to a walk, and some strawberries.

Mell came home in high spirits. It was evident to Tim and his father that she had been drinking, but Nora only felt that she shrank in disgust from something, and dreaded to have the fierce eyes turned upon her, with their threatening aspect.

The next morning Mell washed and ironed Nora's white dress, sadly changed indeed from its pristine snowiness. Gentleman Chaffy hung around the house until after dinner, deciding that Mell was quite reasonable, and offering to take her to a dance that evening. She might almost have relented in her evil purpose, but he stooped to kiss the child, and then her resolve was sealed.

"So Tim h'aint found ye'r Maggie yet!" Mell said, with a leer.

"But I think he will, sometime," and Nora's lip quivered, as she averted her face.

"Wouldn't yer like to take a look yerself?" Now what's to hinder us both a-goin' out—over to Broadway? We'd see the fine swells anyhow, an' we could look in the winders,—they don't charge nothin' for that."

"Oh, could we go, really?" and the little face glowed.

"To be sure we could. Here's yer clean frock, an' mebbe I'd best comb out yer hair. Looks nice like, and shinin'."

Mrs. Rooney had tucked it into a net. Nora had tried a little to curl it, but with poor success. Mell's ungentle hands made Nora cry out with pain now and then, it was such a mass of neglected tangles. But after a while it was made more presentable, and then she was dressed.

Mell looked out of the window. It was very hot, and the street was well-nigh deserted. She put on her bonnet, and the child followed her obediently.

"Now you jest run up to the corner, quick. I want to

tell Mrs. Rooney where we're goin', so's yer new daddy wont get in a tantrum."

"But I'll wait here for you."

"No, go up to the corner. Go quick, or I won't stir a step."

"You *do* mean to come? You will not leave me all alone?" and the child's eyes were wild with a new terror.

"You little fool! Couldn't yer find yer way back? Go quick!" and she gave her a push.

Nora started. Mell ran back up-stairs.

"Mrs. Rooney!" she called, "I'm goin' out, and the child's at play in the street. Will ye jist keep an eye on her, for the old man 'ud be tearing if anything happened to her; an' ye'll tell him, if he comes home first. I want to get a bit o' finery for the dance to-night, and to see a friend."

"Yea," answered Mrs. Rooney, crooning her baby to sleep.

Mell took a glance at the street door. Nora was looking back longingly. She walked along at a rapid pace, not even noticing the child's outstretched hand, and plunged down a side street.

"Oh, wait! wait!" cried Nora.

"Shet yer head, 'r I'll knock it off! There, none o' yer bawlin', or yer'll march straight back home. Come along quiet."

Try her best, Nora could not keep up. She was in wild affright lest Mother Mell meant to lose her. But she paused suddenly.

"We're goin' to get in this ere car. Here's some pen-nies for yer fare when the man comes along. Now don't say nothin' to me."

Nora's heart beat with unwonted fear. She hardly dared look at Mell until the car stopped, and they were

let out. But Mell hailed another in a moment, and as there were but few passengers she unbent a little.

"We'll be there afore very long," she said; "an' you'll be glad to see Maggie."

"Oh, shall I see her, truly?" and Nora's face was all one eager flush. "Do you know where she is?"

"She's at a house where I'm goin'. She's been sick."

"Oh, has she?" My dear, dear Maggie? Is she sick now? Who found her for you?"

"I found her myself;" with a confident nod.

Little Nora was in a maze. She could hardly believe it. She wanted to go on asking questions, but the hard face before her was not encouraging. Presently they stopped again.

Mell took her by the hand now, and they walked a few blocks, stopping before a small groggery. She led the way up an alley, and entered at a side door, a bell sounding to announce them. The room was large, with a sanded floor, a few card-tables with chairs around them, some pictures of fast horses and several rather notorious characters. A large dog lay in one corner, who raised his head and growled, but took no further notice of them. Then another door opened, and a man entered.

Nora clung closer to Mother Mell, and grasped her hand.

The new comer was a most repulsive-looking person. Barely average size, he had a stoop in the shoulders that gave him a crouching appearance. His eyes were small, black, and keen; his grizzled hair fell over a low forehead; his mouth was wide, with dull, swollen lips, and his ragged teeth looked like fangs. A foreigner, evidently; but it seemed as if all nationalities had resolved, by the absence of any distinctive features, to disown him. French, German, and Italian languages he knew equally, and had grafted a patois of all upon the English. Insignificant as he and his place seemed, they were well known to the "fancy,"

and had been more than once suspected by the police, but the most vigorous search had failed to bring anything to light. And yet there went in and out of the den property of the most valuable kind, and Louis Retzer seemed able to negotiate almost everything, from stolen diamonds to a lady's lap-dog.

"Ah," he said, rubbing his hands and showing his teeth, "good-day, Madame! Is zis ze little girl?"

"Yes; she has come to see Maggie," and Mell gave the man a wink. "Stand up, child! Don't lean agin me so. Nobody's goin' to eat you up!" and she gave her a little push.

"Ah—h;" and he took a survey of the trembling child. "Zis hair is all real!" taking the silken mass in his hands.

"Oh, don't! don't!" screamed Nora, springing away like a frightened fawn.

Mell laughed loudly. "She won't be so techy in a few years," she said. "Yes, it's the true stuff, and all fast in her head. Why, that's worth a sight of money."

"Does ze little girl dance or sing?"

"She could learn, I s'pose," said Mell, shortly. "There's her hansum face in her favor. I'm sure she could be hired out o' nights; but she's come to see Maggie. Mebbe yer better send her up-stairs. Maggie's sick in bed, and can't come down;" and Mell put on a queer, knowing look.

Nora glanced wildly from one to the other. Young as she was, she distrusted them both.

"Come with me," said Retzer.

Nora's heart swelled up to her throat, and her slight frame trembled. Should she refuse?

"If you don't want to go and see Maggie, we may as well go back then," said Mell, rising.

"Oh, I do! I do!" the child cried, convulsively. "But come with me. I don't like him. I am afraid—"

"Ze little lady need not be afraid of me," said Retzer, with hideous blandness. "Come up-stairs to poor Maggie,

who is sick in ze bed, and who want her little girl. She haf orange and sugar-plum."

He opened the door. Nora gave one questioning glance at Mell, but the stony face repulsed her. Then she followed up the well-worn stairs. She had grown so used to dingy holes and vile smells that she scarcely noticed this.

"Here!"

She walked timidly into the room. The door was closed and locked behind her. Retzer took a stride or two down the stairs, chuckling.

"Well," exclaimed the woman, "ain't she a picter?"

"Ze little girl is very fair, and haf beautiful hair, and nice, very nice legs. But she do not know how to dance, and she will be wild like a cat."

"You can tame her easy enough. A few lashes will do up the bizness; and she'll soon learn to dance. Gals allus take to it naterally. She'd do for stage bizness;" and a coarse laugh ended the sentence.

"Well, what you take for zis child, ha?"

"Fifty dollars," answered Mell, complacently.

"Feefty dollars! Feefty devils! Why, she never be worth that money, nevere! She know noting; she get cross and sick, maybe, and I get myself in trouble. Perhaps zis Maggie make a search."

Mell laughed long and loud. "Maggie! Well, she hasn't put in any claim, so far, nor even her precious self; and my Tim, he's scoured the place all round. She dropped the brat. The mammy's dead, y' see, and the daddy's missin', and the gal didn't want to keep her. I d'n know,—I might find some folks to 'dopt her, seein' she's so hansum; or I could send her to the island. But I thought ther' might be some money in the brat, and we might both do a bit o' bizness. Ther' ain't a mite o' risk, and ef you'll do things square, you may have her; if not, I'll take her, and be goin'."

But Retzer would not hear to this. He insisted that if

he put the child out he would not make more than a dollar a week, and there would be the chance of her dying before she had paid for herself. They haggled and argued, and finally Mell consented to take forty dollars, and the money was counted out, both confederates swearing secrecy.

Mell stopped on her way home and purchased some tawdry finery and a new gilt necklace. Then, as an afterthought, she bought a calico slip for the child, and a box of gaily colored candies, the better to ward off suspicion.

Tim confronted her on the doorstep.

"Did you take Nora?" he cried. "She's never been in the house, and Mrs. Rooney's not seen a sight of her. An' if yer didn't, she's lost agin."

"Lost!" and Mell stopped suddenly. "Lost! Yer don't mean the child? Oh, Tim, whatever will yer daddy say? Run up an' down the street and find her afore he gets in. An' I've bought her a new gown an' some goodies."

"I've run, an' run! No one's seen her. She ain't been playin' with no children. And there's the guv'ner."

He was coming down the street with his swaggering step, his tall, brawny figure the more conspicuous among the dwarfed and half-starved denizens of this section. A triumphant smile crossed Mell's face as she thought how slyly she had outwitted him.

"Tim, yer don't think she could have gone out over to Broadway after her Maggie?"

"Well, I hain't thought o' that, but I guess she has, arter all. Why didn't I run over there first. Oh, won't the guv'ner swear!"

They both began with the bad news in a breath. Mell displayed the gown and said Nora coaxed so to be let out in the street a while; that she had seen her on the corner last, — and then she rushed up to Mrs. Rooney and berated her for her carelessness. Dennis, being home, took his wife's part and ordered Mell out of his sight, and the

affair ended in a fracas of blows. Gentleman Chaffy was rather sullen afterward, and refused to accompany Mell to the dance, but, nothing daunted, she went alone.

"Ye may as well look for a needle in a haystack as that gal! You'll never set eyes on her again," muttered Mell as she strode up the street.

Tim searched the next day, but it was of no avail, and then he philosophically concluded the young 'un had been all plague and no profit. So he plied his daily avocations with a light heart. Carrying a gentleman's valise late one afternoon, he found himself, when he had finished his errand, face to face with a policeman, and his arm in a tight grasp.

"I've been looking for a chap of your size and capabilities," began McBride quizzically. "Just step over here, and let's have a little talk."

"I hain't done nothin' but turn an honest penny, so yer lem'me be! Yer hain't got no show to jug a feller for that."

And yet Tim's heart misgave him a little for past deeds, and his keen eye glanced furtively around for a chance of escape.

"Ha! ha! laughed McBride. A guilty conscience is it, my lad? You know you deserve it. But this time it isn't an old gent who has lost his wallet. It's a chance for you to make a little money."

"Hi! I'm yer chap, then!" and his stolid, sullen expression quickly changed to one of interest.

"Here. I daren't let go of you tricky eels," and the man brought him up in a corner by a turn of his jacket collar. "Now, I want you to tell me the solemn truth, if you don't I'll have you caged for a little matter of a month or so ago, that I know all about;" and there was a confident nod given to emphasize the statement. "You are the chap that was bothering about a lost child, and a girl named Maggie?"

"Yes," cried Tim eagerly. "Oh, have you found her?"

"That we have. She was run over and taken to a hospital."

"Oh, she wasn't killed, was she? The guv'nor took an awful likin' to her, and 'dopted her. Tell yer, wasn't he swearin' mad when Ann Rooney let her go out and get lost. An' I'm mighty glad!"

"What are you talking about?" asked McBride.

"Why, the little gal, Nora."

"That's just the one I *do* want to know about. The woman's in the hospital, and a gentleman wants to find the child. He has offered a reward. Come now, take me to the place."

"A reward. Dang it! that's jist my luck!" and he slapped his ragged knee. "I'm never in at the hangin', or when good clothes are handed round. The gal is gone, lost agin!"

"Oh, come now, that's gammon. You know where the child is," said McBride confidently.

"I wish I did," and he uttered a glib oath. "An' a reward? How much?"

"More than you'll get by keeping back the truth. Come now, own up. The child cannot be of any account to you."

"But I tell you she *is* gone. Las' Friday 'twas. Mother Mell went out an' left her playin' on the sidewalk, and Ann Rooney was to keep an eye on her. An' by night she was gone. I'm tellin' a gospel truth;" though what a gospel truth was would have puzzled Tim fully as much as Nora's disappearance.

McBride did not believe a word. He was well versed in the tricks of street arabs. These people would want to make the best bargain possible, and haggle all night about a sixpence. He would nip this in the bud.

"Tell me where you live, my lad."

"Over on the east side, Water Street."

"Now the number, and your father's name, if you possess such an article."

Tim complied with a little hesitation.

"Now, my lad, you must march off to the station for a few hours. I shall send over to see whether you have told the truth or not. And this Mr. Byington wants to have an interview with you. If you know anything about this lost girl you had better make a clean breast of it, or it will be worse for you."

"I don't know nothin'," rejoined Tim, angrily, feeling that he had somehow been outwitted; and he was not sure what was behind it all.

CHAPTER VI.

B A F F L E D .

MR. BYINGTON found Tim at the station, rather sulky, and a good deal frightened. A detective had been despatched to the abode of the paternal Chafney, and he awaited the result with much anxiety, meanwhile drawing the whole story from Tim, who, being positively assured of his safety, became more communicative.

The story certainly bore the impress of truth. Neither was it wonderful that people in their position should have missed the advertisement. Gentleman Chaffy's literary interest was bounded by a Police Gazette, or some low sporting sheet, Mell never read anything, and Tim had never once imagined that any one was looking up the little stray. If it had been a wallet with valuable papers, now; but in his brief experience children were very plenty, and not much sought after, rather at a discount, indeed. Then Nora had no rich jewelry, or clothes, that spoke of grand connections. Maggie had hesitated no little between a natural love of finery and a sense of propriety. Real ladies never wore jewels or gay attire, though Mrs. Waldeburgh had said, "Don't put any mourning on my dear darling, Maggie. I don't want her last remembrance of me to be one of gloom." Still the girl had felt there must be some token. So she had dressed her in her plainest clothes, and compromised matters by a black sash-ribbon. She could hardly be taken for a rich man's daughter, and her simple story brought no vision of friends and rewards. But Tim felt, now, that his first impression of her was correct; that the nameless grace of refinement he could neither understand

nor explain connected her with wealth in some mysterious manner.

The detective returned about nine in the evening. He had interviewed everybody, questioned everybody, and learned nothing. The whole street had seen the child on the sidewalk, or thought they had, and from this point conjecture ran wild. An old woman was enticing her down the street; a mysterious man had beguiled her into a horse-car; she had followed a group of children; in short, everything probable and improbable.

"That was Friday," said Mr. Byington, "and to-day is Tuesday. I think we will take another search among the various Homes and Institutions, and continue the advertisement. And now, Tim, my lad, look your very sharpest. I will make the reward a thousand dollars to whoever finds the child. You would know her anywhere?"

"That I would, sir. You don't mean all that money, sir? Why, it would be a fortin'!"

"All that. And here is a five-dollar bill to start you with. Here is my business address, also. Come to me with the least tidings."

"Thank 'ee, sir. I'll do my best for so gen'rous a gent, sir. An' may I go now?"

"There is no charge against the boy?"

"Oh, of course not."

Tim pulled the ragged rim of his hat, flew around the corner like the wind, stood on his head, gave a wild whoop, and executed a double-shuffle in quick succession. A thousand dollars! Could the guv'nor snivy on it, he wondered? And how would it do to go West somewhere, and buy out a gold mine at once?

Mother Mell was astounded at the amount of the reward. She kept her own counsel, however, and the next morning had an important errand "'cross town," so afraid was she of Tim suspecting her. After a roundabout journey she reached the abode of Louis Retzer.

He received her with that half-suspicious suavity that so characterized him, and his astute eyes expressed the wonder that he would not allow to pass his lips.

"Yer main amazed to see me, no doubt, so soon agen, but the boss, he wor awful mad about th' little gal. I didn't know he had his heart so sot upon her. An' now he's raisin' blue blazes, an' stirin' up the place right an' left. I only said she wor lost, an' so I've come to git her back agen. I'll give yer money and add a ten spot to it, good enough interest, I'm sure."

He rubbed his grimy hands with provoking blandness, and eyed her with suspicious cunning.

"I am sorry, madame. Ze child was taken away ze same evening, I believe to — to Canada."

"Canada? Is it far off? Couldn't yer write?"

"Ze man — I do not know. He wanted ze little girl to adopt," and Retzer grinned. "You say it was a little beggar wis no home, and no folks, and so I zink it of not much importance, so zat ze little girl have a good home."

He looked sharply at her, as if he would solve the meaning of this sudden change. Mell Chafney had come from no feeling of pity for Nora. She caught at the reward with all the greed of ignorance and brutal selfishness. If she confessed to Retzer, he could not only claim it himself but demand the money he had paid her.

She laughed loudly. "That's a good 'un, that is, but it don't go down. I know the gal's in this shanty."

"Madame may search if she chooses," and the man gave a provoking leer.

"I'll have a peeler here, that I will," and she rose angrily. "If yer don't give up that child double quick it 'll be wus for yer!"

"How can I when I have not got it. If madame had said ze child was so precious. But madame would hardly have ze house searched."

The rough woman lost her bravado under the fixed look. There were too many secrets between them, and he might trick her at last.

She laughed again, hoarsely, "Come, Retzer, we've been good pals, and that there was said in fun. But the boss'll beat me black an' blue if I don't find that child. Say what yer'll take. Would a hundred do now? Not as I knows where I could get so much sudden like, but I *would* do it. Did I ever go back on my word? An' I've been a good customer; come now, ain't I?"

"If I could get back ze child I would. Perhaps zis Maggie know something," and he put on a thoughtful air.

"Maggie! Oh, I ain't such a flat as to b'lieve in Maggie. She shipped the young 'un off too neat, she did. An' 'twould n't be anything to me then. Why, if Maggie turned up yer see the gov'ner couldn't keep her."

She was an adept in lying, this woman, and now she deceived even her shrewd accomplice. Louis Retzer guessed that she had been offered a higher price for the child, and chuckled inwardly at his own bargain. But he was too wise to quarrel with his customers.

"I might wait and see. If zis man come back — but it might be one long while."

"Well, then you can't. I'm awful sorry. I was a bit jealous at first because the boss was so took with her, but when he come to make such a row I thought I'd try her agen. She was a main purty brat, now warn't she?"

"Ze man who took her, he zink so. But zere are many pretty children in ze street."

Mell rose, feeling that she had been outwitted, and that she had herself largely to blame. If she could not have the reward, then good-bye to all further trouble. And she might get herself into some scrape, so it was best to keep on the safe side.

Retzer considered a while after she was gone. He had heard the child's story, and did not think it remarkable.

She had been used to no very great degree of wealth and luxury, that was evident. No rich relatives were likely to come to light, and she had not been stolen. He had passed on children for various purposes, he had even held some for rewards. We have all wept over the horrors of African Slavery, but can we never realize that there is a still more barbarous system of slavery in our midst? Innocent children, in the hands of unprincipled ruffians who claim them soul and body, who hire them out in dens of thieves, in low gin-mills, and that for beauty there is still a lower depth! God help a poor, pretty female child; better a thousand times that she had never been born. No, the race of slave-stealers, of buyers and sellers, are not yet extinct. And the drifting city waifs are but so much *flotsam* and *jetsam* in their hands.

The thousand dollars might have moved even Retzer's stolid nature, but it did not reach him. Truly no place is so safe for misdeeds as a great city. But he had made a very good bargain, and rubbed his hands in a glow of satisfaction.

Meanwhile Tim was indefatigable. He peered into the face of every yellow-haired match-vender, crossing-sweeper, or street-musician. Often his heart beat high with certainty, but a second look brought bitter disappointment.

Mrs. Byington lingered in the city, held by a spell of sympathy, interest, and pity. She had much ado to comfort poor Maggie, who had been plunged from hope to the black depths of despair.

"I am sure she cannot be living," the girl would exclaim. "You see she is old enough to know her own name and story, and some one would hear it. Oh, my poor, poor darling! how can I ever answer to your father for my carelessness!"

Maggie was recovering rapidly now, though her face wore a strained and anxious look, and every new voice startled her. Ellen Brown was a frequent visitor until

Maggie was well enough to be removed to her cousin's house.

"There is one thing you could do for me," she said to Mrs. Byington. "There must be a letter from Nora's father. I will give you the address, and if Mr. Byington would take the trouble to get it. I do not feel quite strong enough to venture out."

"He will be glad to do it, I am sure."

The letter had come. Mr. Waldeburgh was in passionate grief at the tidings of his wife's death. His business was progressing favorably, and by spring he would be able to return for his little girl, whom he charged Maggie to guard with the best of care, and desired her to obtain a nice, quiet boarding-place, where she could devote herself entirely to little Nora. He enclosed a check for their immediate expenses, and promised to send more.

"Oh, what shall I do! How can I ever tell him?" and Maggie wrung her hands in anguish.

"Perhaps I might better answer the letter, Maggie," exclaimed Mrs. Byington. "Do you not think it would be as well not to say anything about the child's loss at present. We *may* find her. I cannot seem to give her up. I might just state your accident, and that you were in good hands; that friends would do everything that was possible for you and Nora. That, you see, would give us about two months again."

"Oh, if you would be so kind! I don't think I could ever write at all. My heart would break in the midst of it. Oh, ma'am, you have been as an angel all the way. What would have become of me if you had been as indifferent as most people?"

"We ought to try to make all amends in our power. And I have been thinking about your future, Maggie. Do not consider me impertinent, but if you meant to depend upon your own exertions when you are strong enough, I should like you to accept some position in my household.

My girl, who is chambermaid and seamstress, is to be married shortly. There are two women and a man beside, so the duties are not very severe."

"Oh, if you would but take me!" and her eyes filled with grateful tears.

"I shall really be glad to. I feel as if I did not want to lose sight of you. And now Mr. Byington insists upon my joining my sons at Niagara. They have made most of their summer tour without me while I have been so interested in the search for this sweet little girl. Will you promise to come about the first of September?"

"Indeed I will, and thank you most kindly. 'Oh, if my little Nora could only have fallen into such good hands,'" cried Maggie, with deep emotion.

"We will hope for the best," returned Mrs. Byington. "I look at every fair-haired child that I pass in the street, for it seems as if she must be found. No one would have any special object in keeping her."

They both uttered a kindly farewell. Margaret Donald missed her friend and visitor sadly. Ellen Brown could not believe that the child was alive. They discussed the matter endlessly, but Maggie became so down-hearted that she began to look forward to the promised change with a sense of relief.

The money from Nora's father, and the small balance on hand, Maggie deposited in the bank to await its rightful owner. The twelve hundred she had received she thought of with a feeling of horror. If that had been all between her and starvation, she would have died sooner than touch a penny of it.

But for that fateful temptation she might have kept better watch. The other claim would have been more sacred. She could not have loved Nora better, but she could never forgive herself for that moment of vexation and impatience. She had been wicked to covet the child of another, and

the instant of carelessness had brought a swift and bitter punishment.

But who was that handsome, evil old woman? She was signally mistaken in her estimate of Nora's father, that was certain; and it afforded Maggie a flush of triumph in the midst of her pain.

Oh, poor, sweet, dainty Nora! Was she dead? thrust into a nameless grave? Or would some one train her to a coarse, common life, make her a little servant, or a slave!

God help her wherever she was! and Maggie fell into a passion of bitter weeping. "Visit upon me any pang, any sorrow," she prayed, "but restore her to a father's arms, a father's love."

CHAPTER VII.

INTO CAPTIVITY.

WHEN Nora was thrust into the room, and the door suddenly locked behind her, she stood a few moments in great fear. The semi-darkness, the couch in one corner, the deathly stillness, conspired to terrify, so that her breath came only at intervals, and though the air of the room was stifling she shivered with icy chills.

The window, which was in some sort of a recess, was barred and then grated, and dingy at that. When her eyes became accustomed to the obscurity, and as no voice spoke to distract her, she crept softly to the couch in the corner. A dirty, ill-smelling comfortable was thrown over it, but there was no person there.

"Maggie," she said softly, her eyes dilated and staring. "Maggie."

No answer. Indeed, so awesome was the silence that now she shook with terror. She could not even cry, though that would have been a great relief. How long she stood there she could not have told; it seemed like a whole day to her, only it grew no darker, and it was after noon when she and Mell had left home.

Child as she was, she knew she had been betrayed. The apathy of despair came over her. She would never see Maggie again. Could she die like her mamma, and be put in the ground? That caused a sickening shudder, so natural is it to shrink from death. But mamma went to heaven. Where was heaven, then? How could one get up to the beautiful blue sky?

The door opened. She ran to the farthest corner, and

hid her face in her hands as if to shut out the next step in misery.

"I will not hurt you, my dear. You need not be afraid. Maggie is not here. She is sick at ze house of a nice, kind lady, vare you will go. But zis woman, Mell, is a bad, wicked creature, and not want you in her house any more. Come, will you not have a cake?"

"No, I am not hungry;" and she shrank away.

"You will not be afraid to go wis ze nice man, ha?" and he studied her with eager interest.

"Will he take me to Maggie?"

The despairing anguish of the voice might have touched a heart still human, but Retzer's was not. He grinned now.

"Yes, it is vat he comes for. And now if you will walk down-stairs and wait."

She was too crushed and desolate to object. The pretty, imperious, and wilful ways seemed to have vanished. So she followed the man in silence.

There was a window in this room that looked out on the dreary alley-way with its high wall. Nora seated herself by it. Something in her quiet dignity awed the man, and he left her to her own meditations for another hour. Then he re-entered with a companion.

The new comer was a man of average size, bnt with a certain graceful suppleness compared with Retzer. He was well-looking, too, with a blond beard, hair of light brown, a rather handsome nose and mouth, but sharp, decisive eyes of a steely blue, and a sharp, commanding air.

"So this is the young one, is it? Well, Retzer, you haven't lied much this time. Stand up, little girl, and let's see how high you are."

Nora rose with a quiet dignity.

"And how old?"

"I was seven in May, — before mamma died."

"That's rather old; you can't begin training too soon," he said to Retzer.

"But she is very small, and she may not know exact; and if she do not suit I have another plan."

"Walk out here in the floor," and he turned her suddenly by the shoulder. "Were you ever sick? Do you love to run and play and skip with other children? Can you laugh and sing and brighten up if the way is clear?"

Nora looked at him with her large pathetic brown eyes, in which there was a wordless entreaty and slow-coming tears that made them resemble limpid lakes in their starry lustre. The scarlet lips quivered, the small hands seemed to grasp at something, but she did not reply.

The man meanwhile was taking an inventory. The elegant figure, the shapely limbs, the dainty hands and feet, the sweet, childish face. Yes, she would work up splendidly.

He drew Retzer over to the window, and commenced in a low tone:

"She's an obstinate little thing, as you see. And there's a year or two of training, *and* the chance of her life. Looks delicate, I should say."

"Well, if you do not like her, I can keep her myself. She might do me as bar-maid. Zat face might bring me much custom."

"But I can't pay any such price. Come now, you are unreasonable."

"Zat is ze price. You take her or you leef her."

"Too much, too much!" with a laugh.

"Very well;" and Retzer gave a nod of indifference.

The man took another look.

"You are a regular Jew, Retzer. You haven't an atom of soul."

"I am not in religion, I am in business;" and he gave an impatient nod. "I cannot stop to talk, and what you call it — haggle?"

"Well, well, we will close up our bargain. I'll never see the half of my money back, may be, but I have taken a fancy to the child."

So the money was counted out, and some sort of a receipt signed between the confederates.

"Now we will be off to Maggie," said the man, holding out his hand.

Nora shrank back. She had not heard much of the talk, but she had seen the money change hands, and she distrusted them both. But Retzer's face was so forbidding, that almost anything promised better than captivity here. She might be locked in that dreadful room up stairs.

"Come!" impatiently; and she followed him through a long, dark hall, emerging into the street. The daylight gave her a sense of freedom and pleasure.

He lifted her into the buggy, and they drove away. The journey was not very long until they came to a ferry. She was glad to sit in the carriage and watch the people, and every moment her childish heart became more and more at ease. Her companion talked pleasantly, and drew from her the simple story of her life, glad to learn that she knew nothing of localities, and that she was indeed a stranger, with no friends likely to make troublesome inquiries.

"And you will take me to Maggie?" she asked, presently; her earnest, beautiful eyes aglow with hope, and her hands clasped in entreaty.

"Oh, to be sure."

His laugh fell unpleasantly on Nora's eager, waiting heart. She did not know why, but she could not *quite* believe. The experience of the last few weeks was making her wise and distrustful beyond her years.

After they had crossed the river they drove through some closely built streets for a short distance, then turned off into country ways. How sweet and clean the air seemed once more! And there was a bird singing. Here were

trees and shrubs, long stretches of grass, a few road-side flowers, — oh, how delightful!

The house stood quite alone. A rather shabby, unpainted place, with shutters at the lower windows, and green papers up-stairs. A large dog ran out, with a joyful bark, but he only received a cut with the lash for his reward. Nora shivered at that.

A woman opened the door, and a dainty white spaniel followed her. There was something of the hardness of Mother Mell about her black eyes, though she was younger, and showed no traces of dissipation. Indeed, she was rather stylishly dressed, and wore a profusion of ornaments.

"Oh, you're home at last, Dick! Supper's been waiting this ever so long, and the meat's about ruined. Why —"

"A new investment! There, what do you think of that?" and he stood Nora on the board walk that ran through a kind of front garden. "That is one of Retzer's bargains, but the man is a regular old screw. This is your new mammy, my love;" and he laughed with coarse jocularly.

Nora looked from one to the other, in a frightened manner, and clasped her small hands.

"She's ever so much prettier than Violetta; and what splendid hair! She'll make a stunning fairy-queen or sylph, Dick."

"Well, take her in the house, and don't be so free with your tongue, on a short notice."

Nora followed, tremblingly. There was a parlor, in which seemed to be collected something from the four quarters of the globe, — a strange medley indeed. In the next room a table was prepared for supper. A savory smell permeated the apartment.

"Is Maggie here?" the child asked, timidly.

"Maggie? Lord, no. Who's Maggie, pray tell?"

Nora's feelings and hopes had been on the utmost stretch for so long, and now the awful certainty that she had been

deceived again burst over her with the force of a rushing flood. Every prop was swept away, and the child left utterly defenceless.

"I want Maggie!" she sobbed hysterically. "He told me she was here. I must have her, I must! I won't stay. Let me go!"

"Hoity toity! What a little tragedy-queen it is! My dear, you'll have to stay. It's night you see, and you'd get lost if you went out."

"But I want to get lost! I want to die and go to mamma! I don't care if they do put me in the ground!" and she pulled away from the woman.

The Spaniel began to bark, and a small terrier jumped down from his cushion, while a parrot commenced her shrill screeching.

"Here, what's all this devil's row about," and the master of the house administered a vigorous kick to the dogs. "Blast those nuisances! Come, come, youngster, shut up now, or you'll get a taste of this whip!" and he dangled a riding whip almost in Nora's face. "Couldn't you let her alone, Kate?"

"She began asking for Maggie. Dick, it's a stolen child, and I said I'd never have another poor innocent torn from its mother's arms. Why, its worse than heathen slavery!"

"Hold your jaw! See here, now," and he lifted Nora on his knee. "Maggie's dead. I'll swear to that fact on the Bible. No use a talking about her, or asking for her, you can't bring dead people out of their graves. We've taken you now, and we'll give you a good home, and make a handsome lady out of you. But you've got to stop this confounded crying, or I'll thrash you within an inch of your life. D'you hear?"

"O, don't, Dick! Poor little thing! She'll stop presently! She's all strange-like now, and tired, and everything. You'll send her into hysterics."

"Then I'll lick her out of them! You're not going to make such a puling brat of her as you did of Vy. Come! are you going to hush?"

The violence of the paroxysm had already spent itself. She had learned so much repression already, this poor little Nora, and she had seen the children so mercilessly beaten while at Mother Mell's, that she shrank with terror.

"Oh, don't whip me!" she cried, "I will stop! I will try!"

"There, that's a brave little woman. Come, there's nothing to cry about. You might have fallen into worse hands. Here's a nice supper, and a pudding, I'll swear, and may be some other goodies. And this is your new mammy, Kate. Maggie couldn't hold a straw to her. There! Wash her face, Kate, and come along. I'm devilish hungry."

Kate washed her face, and pushed the hair out of her eyes, then led her to the adjoining room. A girl of eighteen or twenty was bending over the stove in the kitchen, and now brought in some steaming dishes. She had a round, stolid, unmeaning face, but was a trusty servant, the better suited to her master and mistress in that she was both deaf and dumb.

As Nora glanced around she took a little courage. It was so much better than Mother Mell's dirty, thriftless home. There was an untidy look, a profuseness of ornamentation, much of it tawdry, yet comfortable and cheering. The pictures looked like old friends. The brackets with their vases of artificial flowers, or plaster statuettes, seemed to indicate a love of beauty, if not very pure taste.

"Here!" said Kate, kindly, "you shall have this nice china plate and mug, with pretty roses on it. Now you are going to be my good little girl, and not cry any more, and to-morrow you shall see sights of nice things. You'll like living here with me, I know."

Nora swallowed a sob. She hated to be ungrateful. And it was so much better than that vile city den.

Kate kept filling her plate with choice morsels. She forced herself to eat a little; Kate and Dick went on with their own talk, of which she understood nothing, interlarded as it was with bits of French and German. Afterward, Kate held her on her lap, and showed her a collection of photographs and engravings, mostly of actors, singers, and noted gymnasts.

"This was Violetta. But she didn't have such hair as you. I used to fix false curls and things in it when she went on the stage," she explained.

"Was she an angel?" asked Nora, remarking the wings of the sylph-like little being in scant gauzy drapery.

"An angel! No!" and the woman laughed loudly; "her mother was a stage dancer, but the poor thing died, and we took Vy. She was five years old then. She was wonderful. She could fly, you see. It's a stage trick, my dear, you'll know all about it some day. But there was always a crowd to see her. And she could do tight-rope splendidly. She took to 'em all quite natural, but she was a poor weakly little thing."

"Where is she now?"

"Why, she's dead; died, let me see, six weeks ago. She was flying one night, and she fell and struck her head. I told Dick she wasn't strong enough. You see she'd grown so weak that her head wasn't steady. But Dick wouldn't throw up the engagement. It was Donnelly's Circus, and we were West just then. A circus always draws best in country places. I hope you'll like it, my dear."

"Like what?" said Nora, with intent eyes.

"Why, the stage. The dancing, the flying leaps, and all that. You'd look gorgeous, you would, with all this long shining goldy hair, and your great black eyes, and your beautiful hands and feet. Wouldn't you like to be

all dressed up in lace and roses, and in the midst of the lights and music? It sets one fairly wild, it does. Didn't you ever dance any?"

"Sometimes, when mamma used to play."

"Let's try now. I'll wind up the music box, and we'll have a round or two. I hope you'll learn easy. You see Dick is awful stern. No matter whether it's a dog or a monkey, or any animal, or even a child. I do suppose he could make lots of money as a beast tamer, but it's awful dangerous. You see it's in Dick's eye. Nothing hardly dares disobey him. Take hold of my hand, now, there, so. Tra-la, tra-la," and she whirled the child around.

The music was very inspiring, but Nora was tired and depressed. Graceful she certainly was, but it was a child's untrained grace. The wonderful poses, the airy balancing, and wild leaps, she knew nothing of.

"Well, I think you can learn," was Kate's verdict; "only you will have to be mighty spry. The tenth of September Dick has an engagement in Chicago. They're going to put on the "Fairy Ring" again, and you'll have to take a name. Let me see. Titania, you know, was queen of the fairies, — I mean to name you. You never saw it, I s'pose. It's just elegant; fairies, and nymphs, and Bottom, just fit to make you split yourself laughing. And oh, such music and dancing! I've been in the ballet myself. If I'd been real handsome, I'd kept on; but you see one needs to be young, and all that; and you get bouquets, and rings, and bracelets, and they make little suppers for you; and it's just jolly while you have good luck, and keep your beauty. But the managers ship you off so soon, and there's always dozens to take your place. I was in love with Dick, too, — a whole crowd of them were, and I thought it was nice to be married. I did take him in awfully, though. I was four-and-twenty, but I swore to nineteen. You see the life ages one fast. I've never been sorry that I took Dick, though I do a stroke of business

now and then for myself. And I have real diamonds,—the genuine article; earned 'em myself; and I've lots of silk gowns. I tell you what, I do sometimes cut a swell, dressed up in all my pretties, walking alongside of some great lady. She couldn't tell but what I lived on Fifth Avenue, or boarded at a crack hotel. Oh, my, you're almost asleep, poor, tired little thing! I guess I'll put you to bed."

Nora winked her eyes wide, and drew a quivering breath. The long monologue had been almost like a lullaby. Then, too, Kate's voice had a smooth, flowing sound, and, with the day's excitements and changes, Nora was very tired. Kate lighted another lamp, and taking the child by the hand led her up-stairs.

The chamber was in much the same order as the rooms below. Kate swept a lot of finery off the bed, and deposited it on a lounge, then began to undress the child. First she brushed out the shining hair, and twisted it in a knot behind; took off the dress, and found the undergarments in an almost filthy condition.

Ah, how beautiful the soft pink flesh was, with its dimpled shoulders, its rounded limbs, replete with the grace of a painted cherub; the delicate ankles, the litheness, the wonderful symmetry! Mother lips had kissed it in its innocence, had smiled over it with the tender pride a mother feels who has added a tithe of pure beauty to the world. How often she had laid her in her little bed, and prayed over her; and was she now to be plunged into the jaws of that devouring, insatiable monster, with its hydra heads of greed and amusement? And this woman who gloated over her now had never known the sacred rapture of a mother's love.

"You are like a little Cupid," she said, kissing her. "You'll make fortunes, and break hearts."

Then she laid her in the bed. Tired, sleepy, strange, and excited, little Nora forgot her prayers.

CHAPTER VIII.

HER MASTER.

AFTER all, she was but a little child, — a child with the instincts, and longings, and desires of heaven, perhaps. Brought up by her mother's knee, she would have been an angel. Two months ago she was there. Since then her scarce wiser than baby ears had been polluted by foul oaths and ribaldry; she had been deceived, betrayed, sold and bought; she had known hunger and hard usage; and it seemed now as if she had fallen into the lap of luxury and tenderness.

Dick Bridger went away early the next morning on some important business. Kate was kind to the child; she was not really hard by nature, though circumstances and experience had blunted her finer feelings. Nora played about, looked at the pictures and curiosities, and was wonderfully entertained by Sylvie and Pix, the two dogs. Kate made them go through their tricks — marching on their hind legs, shouldering a musket (a tiny toy one), playing at domestic tea-table quarrels, dancing, and walking a tight rope.

"They do say Pix is a wonderful dog. Dick has been offered a sight of money for him. He hires him out now and then. You see people are so queer. Once in a while there comes a rage for trained dogs, and everybody rushes to see them; then it all dies out. He could hire them to an organ-player, but they're valuable and delicate dogs. Then there is a play where they're needed. And I like Sylvie; she's almost like a child to me."

The pleasures were interspersed with dancing-lessons.

Nora was an apt scholar, certainly; but her movements were those of delicacy rather than *abandon*. And she was happy, — so happy, she forgot Mother Mell; almost forgot Maggie, I was going to say.

"You'll make Dick mad if you talk about her," was Kate's warning. "She's most likely dead, and you can't bring her to life by worrying; and if you know when you are well-off you'll keep on the right side of Dick."

Nora studied her with questioning eyes, but no further explanation was vouchsafed.

Three days of comfort and pleasure, and then Dick Bridger made his appearance.

"I just want you to see Nora," declared Kate. "I've been making her a stunning rig. I'll go dress her now; and she dances like a little angel."

"I'm glad you improved the time," returned Dick. "Tomorrow I must take her in hand myself. Let's see what you have made of her."

Kate began to disrobe the child, and put on her a gauzy, spangled, nondescript sort of garment, that left bare shoulders and limbs. Then she brushed out the beautiful golden mane that floated around her like a cloud.

"Now come out to Dick. You do look just like a picture. Oh, my beauty! I wish you were going on the stage this blessed minute. Come;" and she reached out for Nora's hand.

Modesty had been the child's birthright. Kate's fondling and caressing had not startled her, but she had been so little accustomed to men that she shrank now in terror.

"Oh, no, no, don't!" she cried. "Dress me some more; he will look at me!"

"You little fool! I want him to look at you! What would you do before a great theatre-full? Why, you're as pretty as you can be! Don't put on airs;" and she dragged her forth.

Abashed, stunned, not daring to look up; feeling in

every pore of her child's body the sacrilege, yet unable to give it any name; ignorant that what she battled for with a sweet womanly blushes was her own inalienable nameless. She stood with downcast eyes, shrinking, shivering in the folds of Kate's dress.

"No nonsense, little one! Start up the fiddle, Kate, and let us see how your pupil progresses."

Kate pushed her off; but, with a wild cry, she flew back again.

"Don't be foolish. Come here, in the middle of the floor;" and Dick Bridger's decisive voice made her start as if stung. "Let her alone, Kate. If this is your training, the less she has of it the better."

"Oh, Nora, little pet, do as he bids you; quick!"

"Go out of the room, Kate."

She knew it would be worse for the child if she stayed. Training scenes were no new thing to her, and she had yielded to a sort of blind belief in the process. It was always hard in the beginning, whether it were a dog or a child; and Kate's vanity would have been solaced, in a similar exposure, in thinking how lovely the pink limbs were.

Dick approached her. "Don't! don't!" she shrieked, wrought up to a pitch of unreasoning fear.

"Look here! You're a pretty little midget, and you've got to dance for me. It's the sort of business I am going to bring you up to. Now, no airs! Begin to the music."

She looked around like a wild, shy, hunted animal. The eyes dilated, the scarlet lips fell a little apart, and there was a crimson spot upon each cheek, while the rest of her face was deathly white. Her limbs shook, and she gave a quick, gasping breath.

He took down the whip. Sylvie saw it, and ran under the sofa, quite satisfied with her past experience of it. He made the lash whiz in the air, and kept his eyes fixed on the shrinking child.

"Will you dance?"

Dick Bridger was not a brutal man, that is, he was seldom cruel for sport; but when once resolved upon conquering any human thing, he would have killed it sooner than yield a fraction.

"I can't! I can't!" Nora cried in terror. "Let me go!" and she looked as if she would fly.

"Take that!"

It came down across her shoulders, and back, and limbs, the lithe, curling, cruel thing, stinging as if a red-hot iron had burned her; and yet she was so frightened, so amazed, that she did not even utter a cry of pain.

"And that!"

Right into the soft flesh it cut, and left a long, quivering streak. Then, maddened with the pain, she gave one shriek, and flew at him with the fury of a tigress, her whole sweet and gentle nature ablaze with indignation, outraged passion.

He held her off at arm's length, puny little thing that she was in his iron grasp, while the strokes fell with pitiless regularity.

The door was opened.

"Look out for her face, Dick, and her arms —"

"Hold your tongue, or you'll get a taste! Come, now, have you had enough? Will it do for the first lesson? Stand here, now. Begin."

Blinded by her tears of pain and anguish, her flesh throbbing, her blood white-hot with indignation, her limbs faint and trembling, the task seemed quite impossible. Again he raised the whip.

As if in mockery the gay air sounded through the room. Almost beside herself with terror, she took a few slow steps.

"Faster!" and the cruel little lash stung her bare legs.

It was delirium then, the madness of fear and pain. With every step the stripes throbbed and smarted anew, her brain whirled, the light in the room took on a thousand grotesque shapes, came nearer and nearer, as if it would

wrap her in its scorching blaze, and then suddenly went out. There was a little heap of bruised flesh, gauze, and spangles on the floor.

He picked her up and called Kate. She had only fainted, and was soon restored; but she clung to the woman, sobbing hysterically.

"I hope you are satisfied now," Kate began, reproachfully.

"I shall be satisfied when she learns to obey me. I've put too much money in her to fool away; and, besides, some one must take Violetta's place. I'm not going to forfeit a thousand or two dollars if I can help it."

"You might get queen Perdita for some things."

"If you can't hold your tongue I'll find a way to make you, that's all. Don't let me catch you interfering with that young one, or you'll be sorry. I have this thing in hand myself."

With that, Dick Bridger lighted his meerschaum, and turned to his wife, his eyes fixed and glowing with authority.

"Take the child to bed. I'll give you just five minutes. No molly-coddling."

She took Nora in her arms and carried her up-stairs without a word, tore off the fatal finery, and looked at the poor little back where the stinging whip had left purple welts. You shudder at the cruelty! Ah, how many parents have done the same, and dignified it with the high-sounding name of necessary discipline, quoting for their authority that "he who spares the rod, spoils the child"! How many brutal and drunken men and women torture their offspring with a more fiendish ingenuity than the slave-drivers whom we used to execrate! Oh, what a farce, what a hideous satire it is, that ties of blood bring nearness and tenderness! You have not forgotten the brute that beat his little boy crazy with bewildered terror, and then to death, to force him to say a prayer! Hardly a week passes but some fiend in human form is brought up

for cruel treatment to a poor little defenceless child. Oh, for shame, you with strength of giants, to beat and crush and maim those in your power, because they are weak and small, and cannot defend themselves! For shame, that in a moment of passion you fly to leathern strap or lash of whip, — fit instruments, perhaps, for barbarians and brutish criminals, — and cut and slash the tender flesh of a little child!

And you pity Nora, lying there, motherless, worse than friendless, every inch of flesh throbbing with the torture of pain, her soul one bewildered pang of piteous anguish! Ask yourself if you have never thus sent a little child to bed, punished at a fearful ratio for some fault of youthful heedlessness, or perhaps springing from a fatal weakness of character that terror can never cure. Ah, how will you answer to God for all your cruelties?

Kate put on her night-dress and laid her in the bed, then stooped to kiss her.

"Oh, why did you let him?" she cried, fiercely. "I can never love you again, — never!"

"You are an unreasonable little thing, Nora. Why couldn't you have danced as well for him as for me? And I hated so to have him beat you; but I do believe the man is master of everything he comes across. I soon found that out, and let him have his way. He won't starve you, and that's more than can be said for every one. There, I must go."

If she were starved she would die. She might have crawled to the window and thrown herself out, but that did not come into her mind. Suicide is born of morbid desperation, and seldom occurs to a child. But now Nora's brain was roused. She resented fiercely, in her childish way, the indignity that had been offered her. If her puny hands could have known how to strangle big Dick Bridger in his sleep, I think she would have done it. And only the other day she was lying in her mother's arms, innocent as an angel!

She tossed and tumbled on the bed, and moaned with her pain. The moonlight looked in her window, and then she rose and cooled her tear-stained face in the night breeze. The street stretched out straight before her, though it was not much more than a country road. Why could she not slip down-stairs by and by, when the rest were asleep, and run away? Some kind heart would surely take her in. And when she told them how Dick beat her, and how he meant to train her for a dancing-girl, would they let him? Was everybody as cruel as Mother Mell, and the man in that vile place who had given her to Dick? If she could only find Gentleman Chaffy again, or Tim!

She crawled back to bed, intent upon her new plan, her mind wrought up to that nervous pitch where sleep becomes an impossibility. Kate came and looked at her again as she shuffled off to bed, but then Nora's eyes dropped shut suddenly, so soon had she learned the art of deceit. And then she heard Dick whistling the same air the music-box played,—a bit of *Opera Bouffe*. How she hated it, and she clinched her little hands.

A long while after, all the house was still. Any other time the awful silence would have terrified her. She rose softly, and crept out to the hall, her little bare feet making no noise. The moonlight shone in the window, making patches of ghostly white light, and leaving strange, dark corners in which phantoms might lurk. She shivered, but went on, through the hall, out to the kitchen, as this door was farther away from Dick's ears, if they were sharp. There was a bolt about midway, but she stood on a chair that she might have more strength to draw it. Her breath came hard, her slender hands tugged and tugged, but presently it moved, and then slipped with a sudden snap, that for an instant terrified her.

Opening the door she glanced around. How good and comforting the night air felt to her fevered brow and wounded body. Where should she go? There was a

house over yonder, they might take her in. Or perhaps it would be better to walk on, and on, all night:

There was a sudden, mysterious swish in the air, a stealthy step, and a huge dog confronted her. His eyeballs glared like balls of fire, his white fangs shone in the light with savage intensity. With one wild, blood-curdling cry, she dropped insensible again.

Dick Bridger was aroused by the cry, and the low alarm of the dog. Rushing down-stairs he picked up the child.

"Hang the little devil!" he exclaimed, angrily. "Do you suppose she walks in her sleep; she had the door unbolted —"

"If you had not gone at her so savagely this evening," interrupted Kate.

"Seeing that I never trained anything before," said Dick sarcastically. "Of course I don't know how to begin. I never drew a drop of blood on the child's body. My dad did that for very small trifles when I was a youngster, let me tell you, and it didn't kill me, either. You don't imagine such a midget could be meaning to run away?"

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Kate, with great satisfaction.

"Gad! I *would* thrash her if I thought that. Is she never coming to?"

Better perhaps that she had died in that long swoon. A shudder ran through her frame presently, and the eyes rolled languidly, while a scarlet flush overspread her face as she drew a long, sighing respiration.

"Hang it! If she wasn't so handsome I wouldn't bother with her. That old villain, Retzer, *is* a good judge of beauty. May be you had better stay with her, Kate; or shall I?"

"No, I will."

"I guess we'll give her a dose. It will make her sleep, and that's the thing she needs now."

He poured some brandy in a glass, put a little water with it, and forced it down the child's throat, stopping to watch

the effect. It warmed her chill, shivering limbs, it flushed her pale face anew; and though she muttered some incoherent words, she presently dropped into a deep, dreamless slumber, looking as she lay there like some marvellous piece of statuary. How an artist would have raved over it.

"Poor little kid," commented Kate. "After all you are as well off here as anywhere, and when the training's through you can make a fortune, ride in your carriage, and have diamonds and Indy shawls, and silks and laces. She's got the face and the hair for it. And 'tisu'n't likely this Maggie she talks about wanted to keep her, after her mother died. May be there's a father in the case, may be not; I've heard stories before. And if I was to send her to the Homes, or to the Island, she'd be bound out some where, and I know a little about that. She'd be worked like a slave, and may be beat like one. Women are none too good when they have the power. But she's a queer little innocent, and that's the worse for her. They get over it though. And the rich ones are precious little better than the poor ones, who have to do or starve."

At this point in her reflections Kate went off into a doze. A common-place woman, with the most trivial aims; a woman whom no training could have ennobled or dignified, and yet her training had all been against her. A waif from a country almshouse, bound out for a drudge and slave, every point of girlish vanity or prettiness repressed, snubbed, her hair cut close with boyish ungracefulness, her shoes coarse and thick, her dresses the laugh of the neighborhood, what wonder she was caught by the glare and tinsel of a strolling circus troop and became one of their number. She had made capital out of her good looks; she liked the ease and indolence, the travel and amusement of her present existence. Good-hearted, good-natured generally, and not jealous, which Dick found much to his advantage.

It was almost noon the next day when Nora woke. She

had inherited a good and elastic constitution, and these few days of fresh air and wholesome diet had strengthened her greatly.

Kate washed and dressed her. She had made a pretty new gown out of a light plaid silk, and trimmed a hat with much taste.

"Ain't they nice?" she said, displaying them eagerly. "Dick is going to take us in the city to a matinee, and I want you to look pretty as a pink. And you feel real well, don't you, after such a good long sleep."

"Yes," answered Nora slowly."

"You walked in your sleep last night; did you know it? Went down-stairs and unbolted the door, and fainted down there."

"Did I?" Nora said, with a quivering breath, for now it all seemed dreamlike.

"Yes. Leo was out. He's always let out nights. He's a bloodhound, you know. He used to hunt slaves at the South, and he's awful fierce. I wonder that he didn't tear you in pieces last night. I dare say he would if you had tried to go anywhere. No one but Dick could stop him. But I hope you'll never try it again. He could find you anywhere. If I was to give him some of your clothes to smell of, as they always do, he would hunt you up, no matter where you might be hidden."

Nora stood quiet, her eyes humid with speechless fright. She remembered now all she had meant to do,—to run away. And it would be of no use.

"I've managed that," Kate thought to herself. "She isn't likely to cut up that shine again."

Then she tempted her appetite with some dainties, and chattered in such a gay, cordial manner, that Nora was fast resuming her former friendliness. She shrank away when Dick entered, but he was in a very jolly mood, hurrying them to get ready for their journey.

They went in their own conveyance, and drove to the

door of the theatre. Dick saw them seated, but to him the shallow burlesque would have been insufferably tiresome. There was a glitter of lights and a deafening crash of music that so startled Nora she kept tight hold of Kate's hand. Then the curtain rolled softly upward, and the play began. There was an enchanting princess, in azure and silver, a prince in scarlet and gold, elfs, fairies, wood-nymphs, butterflies, peasants in white with bare ancles, shepherds who danced and sang; a ballet troupe in scanty drapery of rose and azure, and fays in puffs of cloudy tulle. They laughed and danced and sung, they uttered shallow witticisms and bad puns, strung together by bits of dialogue; were applauded and had flowers thrown to them, and to the sweet, simple child Nora, it was grander and more beautiful than any fairy story she had ever read. Her cheeks flushed, and her eyes sparkled with excitement, and Kate, watching her, thought of a time when she would hold an audience entranced.

"For she's so much handsomer than that scrawny little Violetta, who always looked frightened out of her senses. It's good the poor thing's dead."

And Violetta, at rest in her little nameless grave, would have thought so too if the dead ever could think.

In her pretty dressing-room sat Mrs. Byington, studying a picture of a lovely child's face, and sighing unconsciously over it. At Ellen Brown's, poor Maggie wiped away her tears, and hoped against hope. Mr. Byington, Tim, and a keen-scented detective were searching the city, and oh, sad satire, *she* had come and gone in their very midst, had been tempted by the glare and show, the gilt and tinselled draperies, and was about to make a plunge in that seething vortex, pushed in by greed, on the one side, and the demand for wild, fantastic, and *bizarre* amusements on the other.

CHAPTER IX.

THE VICTORY OF DESPAIR.

KATE, woman-like, had tempted Nora with the rose-colored seductiveness of her new life. There was a glamour that enchanted. Dick Bridger would have made the training a mere matter of business, since that it must be in the end.

And now it began in earnest. A series of the lighter gymnastics at first, made entertaining by his praise and encouragement. Perhaps he felt that it was not best to terrify her by too much roughness. Yet Nora was not a daring child. When she climbed dizzy heights, when she sprang through hoops suspended in mid-air, she experienced a tendency to shrink and scream. But those stern eyes were upon her; the whip was always at hand.

She had yielded passively to her new life. While she could not believe that Maggie had purposely deserted her, the nurse became to her a memory, like her dead mamma. Escape from this place was not to be thought of, for Leo seemed to her a frightful, devouring monster. And she began to experience a clinging tenderness for Kate, who held her, made her fine clothes, was demonstratively fond, and often foolishly indulgent. She related episodes of her own life as she would have done to an equal, stories of the stage that had a certain tempting brilliancy, and were well calculated to lure the simple child onward. Other associates there were none. Lena, the maid, gave her admiring glances, and threaded her beautiful hair in wonderment, but there could be no conversation between them. Pix and Silvie were her playmates.

Yet for childhood's simple enjoyments she came to have little taste, and no strength. She was so exhausted by her daily practices that for hours afterward she was compelled to lie on the sofa. The August weather was oppressively hot. Dick plied her with stimulants, judiciously used, it is true, yet fearfully dangerous in the habits they might engender. Of her future he thought little. He had seen so many wrecks of pretty young girls that one or more made slight difference to him. He could count on a few years of popular favor for her, *if she lived*.

The training-room was the large unfinished garret overhead, made more airy and light by two large skylights that were always open in such weather. Here were pulleys, rings, frames, hurdles, in short all devices, and the place looked not unlike an inquisition chamber. To the little dead Violetta it had proved a place of torture many a time. Nora entered it with fear and trembling, and often left it so exhausted that she could scarcely breathe.

"You are quite up in those flying leaps," Dick said one morning. "The only thing for you is not to lose your head. You want to keep your thoughts fixed on what you're about; no wandering, mind! And now you're to be promoted."

Nora glanced about timidly. There was a thick rope stretched across the place some four feet from the floor.

"You are to walk this, to-day. See, you hold this balancing-rod in your hands, so, and glide over quickly."

He ran a short distance in order to explain it the better to her.

It seemed so impossible to her that she could preserve an instant's footing on the rope. She eyed it with a shivering hesitancy.

"Come, quick! You'll have a few tumbles in the beginning, but the distance is nothing, and these old mattresses will break the fall. Mount."

"If it were not so high —"

"Then you'd step off every other minute. You'd never acquire any self-reliance. And for a real stage performance you'd be up two or three times as high."

She took the balancing-pole and stepped up from a stool. The next instant she was down again.

As I have said, Nora was not a daring child. Some of these feats had come to have a breathless fascination, but it was the awful fascination of terror, a struggle for personal safety and life. So now after two or three vain essays her courage forsook her.

Dick Bridger understood the case well. There must be a fear above this personal fear of mind, an absolute terror of physical suffering. He had taught it to a dog, to a monkey, to a horse, and a child. In most cases, since every law of being must be altered or violated, the hope of reward was not sufficiently strong. The more brutish the instinct, the more readily amenable it was to sweets and luxuries. But in this case indulgences would not answer. She was trying her unaided best, but it must be aided by something outside of herself.

There was a fierce resolution in his eye, and his lips settled in a firm line as he took his whip.

"Oh, don't strike me!" she cried, the soft eyes wild with fearful dread. "I cannot do it, indeed."

"Not a word. One more chance. If you fall more than twice in crossing it, you shall taste of this little fellow. Hear his song, let that animate you."

It whizzed in the air, making her shrink in every nerve.

"Now, think that you *can* do it. Don't stop to believe in failure."

With a long, quivering breath she mounted, but the room seemed to swim before her. Down once, twice — could she reach the end that looked so far away? Every muscle of her body was strained, she could not feel the rope under her feet. Oh heaven!"

She felt the sharp stinging blows raining upon her, for

her garment was a mere thin covering, to give her limbs the utmost freedom. She did not turn on her master now, he looked so large and terrible beside her; she only begged, and pleaded, and promised.

"Well, try it again, now. I shall stand at this end and look you in the eye, so. Here is the whip."

Stinging and burning, and half maddened with the cruel suffering, she mounted again. Her master's steely eye glowed like a coal. Ah, those were days of martyrdom when they ran over bars of red-hot iron, and this was for the pleasure of a gaping crowd, the applause when this tender little child risked life and limb.

She was beside herself with apprehension. The balance-pole wavered. Like a flash she trod the distance, to fall into her master's arms at the end.

He did not stop to praise, for he knew the desperate mood would prove but momentary, so simply said "again," and it was successfully achieved.

"Again!"

"Oh, let me stop," she shrieked in anguish.

His only answer was a cut of the whip. Before she had gone a dozen steps she was down, and the punishment followed surely.

He did not yield until he had gained that tremendous ascendancy of terror over her that seemed to transfer her own volition to his will. He commanded, she obeyed. He knew just how far he could stretch the screws of his inquisition, a brutal master might have done more. With him it was a mere matter of business.

Kate had been sent over to the city with the privilege of buying some finery, always sufficient temptation to her. Dick took the child down-stairs, gave her an anodyne, and put her to bed; and though she shuddered and moaned, still she slept, and renewed her wasted strength.

It was almost night when she woke, stiff, and sore, and bewildered. Crawling over to the window, the old idea

of escape flashed into her mind once more. What was to hinder her from trying it in the daytime, when Leo was chained?

A step startled her. It was Lena who had come to dress her. First she had a refreshing bath, and the rough, stolid girl wiped the little scarred back tenderly. Her clothes were soft and fine, and put on with care. Her hair was brushed, and Lena led her down-stairs.

"Come," said Dick. "Come, sit on my knee and eat some dinner."

There was a little table spread for her with some tempting delicacies. But she shrank and shivered, and her soft eyes grew almost filmy under his glance. Yet the awesome fascination drew her to his very side. He lifted her on his knee, but she could not repress a sick shudder.

He went on as if he had not noted it. She turned away from the morsel of broiled chicken he held for her.

"Come, you are to eat;" and he fixed his eyes on the pale, shrinking face.

She obeyed him as if under a spell. And when her fright wore away a little, she was really hungry, she found. He talked pleasantly, called Sylvie to do an odd trick, and made the parrot go through some amusing evolutions.

"Have you had sufficient? Take a little more of this nice cream. And these berries are luscious."

"I cannot eat any more," she answered, timidly.

"Well, get your hat then. We are going to ride."

"Where is Kate?"

"Oh, not home yet. I wonder what she will bring you? Something nice, I dare say."

She found her hat, and he lifted her into the light wagon. Over the smooth road they bowled, and now the sun had dropped in his bed of flaming gold, and soft brown shadows were falling around leafy nooks and by the sides of cottages. Here a motherly hen clucked to her brood, there a long procession of geese gossiped on their

homeward route, a dog lay sleeping on a vine-covered porch, or sitting expectant at a gate. Groups of children made the air ring with playful shouts, free and happy children, some barefooted, and in faded gingham dresses. Did they envy this little lady in her silk attire, her long white feather drooping amid her waving hair. She was a princess to them, but only a few hours ago she had been beaten like a slave! She seemed to feel the cruel mockery of contrast herself, and oh, how she longed to be one of them. How vividly the picture of her own pretty home came back — the little garden and the flowers, the canary singing in the window, the sleek maltese cat washing her face, her own dear mamma sewing, or reading her stories, or playing on the piano. And then it seemed as if she must fly, that she so hated her master beside her she would be glad to see him lie dead here in the very road. It was a guileless child's heart no longer.

He was watching her face with an amused smile. The brave, defiant eyes, the cleft-rosebud of a mouth, the dimpled chin, the wonderful pearly complexion, and these fleeting thoughts holding mimic carnival over it, — would she were years older, that he might master her for himself instead of a senseless public. So cruel does a knowledge of unlimited power and authority make men.

Kate brought her some bracelets — she did not need to explain that they were the dead Violetta's, burnished anew — and a box of French bon-bons; but what she prized most of all to-night, a little nosegay of white tuberose and purple heliotrope.

The training went on. Some days she was fortunate, on others the cruel lash was her mentor. The fear of Dick finally overcame her natural childish timidity and want of daring. And once at this point she improved rapidly.

But the great object never once went out of her mind. She would run away. She was quiet, obedient, indeed

much interested in her surroundings, for Kate was both indulgent and entertaining, and Nora was but a child, susceptible to kindness, and easily won through the immaturity of judgment that lends to childhood its greatest charm.

Dick had gone out one day immediately after dinner. Nora played around and looked at pictures, until presently Kate dozed on the sofa. Lena was in the kitchen knitting. Now was her time.

She took her hat from the rack in the hall and put it on leisurely, though her heart beat in great, frightened bounds. Slowly she walked out to the gate, and opened it without a creak. And then she went straight on for a short distance, though she did not care to go city-ward, and soon turned, winding up and down with a curious animal instinct of safety. By and by she found a shady country road, and sat down to rest, for she was warm and tired.

Ah, how delightful it was! The sweet air, the soft carpet of grass, the birds singing overhead, and here a tiny stream of water with a few flowers at its edge. It led into a kind of wood. She climbed the fence easily, she wandered on and on with an exhilarating sense of life. Of to-morrow she could not think, she was so glad to be free. A gray squirrel came and looked her in the eyes, it seemed as if he laughed; she did so in the pure gladness of her heart, light now as yonder floating thistle-down.

She stopped and drank out of the pellucid stream. She was a little hungry, too, and now the sun had disappeared. A few birds called sharp and shrilly, as if chiding some late wanderer; there was a peculiar rustling sound in the leaves, that somehow sent a shiver. Would she dare stay here all night? Were there bears, and lions, and tigers about? Would it not be better to climb up in some tree?

Or perhaps a tender heart might be found to take her in. And yet she was afraid of her kind, they had all been so

cruel to her. If she could only live here under the trees, and find something to eat! But there was the winter, and cold, and storms!

She rose, and picked her way about a little. It was growing very dark now, and the trees looked like grim ghosts, with arms stretched out ready to seize her. She could find no trodden path; the briars scratched her hands and her ankles; and hark, what was that? a fierce cry that seemed to turn her blood into ice. She had never been much alone with the terror of night and solitude, and now she shivered with vague fear. She leaned against the sloping trunk of a tree, and then decided to climb it. And here her newly developed agility came into play. From branch to branch she went, until she felt that she was quite safe from any wandering marauders.

Overhead the stars came out. She did not feel so afraid then. Rocking herself to and fro, her thoughts went back to her mother. Was God up in the sky now, and did he care for little children? No one had said anything about Him lately. Tim did not know, and Kate had laughed. No one went to church, and she played on Sunday, and was trained; and what became of God then? There was the sky and the stars, and mamma was up in heaven. Suppose she said her prayers now; it had been such a long, long time, since she had said any.

Nora knelt as well as she could, keeping tightly hold of the branches. First, "Our Father," then "Now I lay me." The long accustomed formula followed, "God bless mam—, and then a sob shook her slender frame. Oh, why did God take her mamma? Were there so many little children up in heaven that had no mammas? For she wanted her sorely.

"Maggie!" she cried, "Maggie!" and the sound of her own voice terrified her.

There was a dull echo; the leaves rustled, and that was all.

"But it will be morning soon," she said hopefully. "If I dared to go to sleep."

And then she grew very drowsy, a little chilly to, with the cooler night winds.

Hark, what was that! A voice, surely. She sat up now, her senses keenly alert. A crashing and tearing among the underbrush, as of some wild animal, and an icy terror took her in its grip. She made no sound, obeying her instinct of self-preservation.

It came nearer. It stopped at the foot of the tree, and pawed and snuffled. Then it gave a long, low, dangerous growl.

"Leo!" She was too much frightened to breathe. But for the kindly sheltering arms of the tree she would have fallen.

"Leo! Leo! good old fellow, what is it?"

She knew the voice. She had been found!

The steps came nearer. Leo gave another growl, then a low, joyful bark, and pawed away at the tree.

"There, Leo; yes, good old fellow;" and through the leaves she saw the flash of a lantern. Now the man and the dog were plainly visible. She shuddered at the glare of those terrible eyes, as he stretched himself up towards her, his body almost as supple as that of a snake. She could not even utter a cry.

"Nora. Are you there?"

The tranquil, yet decisive tone, exercised a strange power over her. She was helpless again, quite within Dick's grasp. She tried to answer, but it seemed as if her voice had no sound.

"Nora! Down, Leo! you brute!"

"Yes," she said.

He caught a glimpse of the dress.

"So you are perched way up there! Can you get down?" and his tone was as cheerful as if it were a frolic to both.

"Oh, you won't let Leo —," and there was a deadly anguish in her voice.

"I shall not let Leo hurt you, no. Be careful about slipping. What a climber you are. Here, now."

He was standing at the foot of the tree, and his tall figure reached almost to the lower limbs. He held the light for her, and she came down with a kind of automatic movement, as if fright had curdled the blood in her veins.

"That's right. Now let go," and he took her in his arms. "Leo, guide us out of this infernal hole!"

Not a word did either speak. The careful pressure might have been that of a father. Nora laid her head on his shoulder; he felt her cool cheek on his neck, and heard the half-stifled beating of her heart. Out on the main road the wagon was waiting. Leo followed with sweeping strides.

They drove straight to the barn. He lifted her out, carried her in and sat her on the feed-box, while he put the horse in his stall. Then he stood her on the floor, and sat the lantern in her place. Leo seemed to look on in eager expectancy, his cruel eyes shining like balls of fire.

"So you thought you would try running away?" Dick began.

She glanced at him in silent terror. It was such a weird sight — the great barn with its thatch of hay over head, its motley collection of various articles hanging about, the dim light, the crouching dog, the man whose proportions appeared gigantic, and the trembling, beautiful child, in her torn dress and tangled hair.

"Do you know that at one word Leo, here, would fly at you, and tear you limb from limb?"

She raised her eyes to his, and her lips quivered, but she had no mind to plead even for her life.

He reached over for his whip. The long lash hung tremulous, almost like a sentient thing. An awful chill crept over her soft, shrinking skin.

"And I could whip you until you were a mass of mangled, bleeding flesh."

Then a gleam of lightning scorn flashed out of her eyes, that were humid and black. She stood straight before him, haughty, defying, but with the wonderful beauty of desperation, which is, perhaps, half the martyr's courage. She stamped her small foot, and yet she was passionless.

"Kill me! kill me!" she cried, in a shrill, sweet, frozen sort of tone.

He had a humorous side to his nature, this Dick Bridger, an appreciative side, too. This puny thing, that he could knock senseless with half a blow of his fist, this little mite, daring, defying him, filled him with a sense of amusement.

"I shouldn't kill you," he said calmly. "I should whip you to-night until you were all bruised and bleeding, then I should whip you again to-morrow night, and so on, until I fancy you would never want to run away again. Come, don't you think you deserve it?"

Her eyes grew luminous, and distended with terror, but she made no reply.

He toyed a few seconds with the lash, and the lithe, black, serpent-like thing seemed endued with life. Then he dropped it, and came a step nearer.

"Well," he said, in the same calm tone, "I am not going to punish you at all, if you will promise me one thing. You have never told a lie since you came here, I think. If you will say now, on your honor, that you will never attempt to run away again, we will shake hands and be good friends."

She stood quite still, as if she had not heard him, her little hands trembling at her side. The revulsion of feeling was so great that she could not comprehend. She raised her troubled, questioning eyes, the daring light all gone out of them. Then she gave a spring, clasped his knees, and was sobbing wildly.

"Oh, I will! I will promise you! I will never run away

again: no, not even if you kill me! And I will try to do all you tell me —”

He lifted her up and kissed the wet face, touched in spite of himself.

“There, there,” he said, soothingly. “Now promise me once more, and kiss me on it, and I shall know that you are too brave a girl to tell a lie. Come, Leo, we’ll go back to the house. Don’t sob so, child.”

She clung round his neck, and pressed her cheek to his, conquered in a double manner, — by the fear that had ruled her so tensely before, and by the love, that seemed so generous to her, simply from contrast with the power. He recognized the nature. He had found it in a thorough-bred horse, in a pure-blooded dog, and some few women. The larger soul that forgives a blow, because it is generous, not craven, and if once taken at the flood tide would yield its life; nay, what is really more, after all, would give its living body for all time, to be tortured, beaten, starved, so long as it ministered to the master’s happiness by one jot. Nay, you have sometimes seen savage beasts display this overwhelming love, and yet, oftener than you think, it had a wild, awesome terror for its foundation, but a terror that was not abject.

He held her on his knee after they entered the house, and tried to restore her to calmness, talking in a cheery way, and feeding her with some luscious peaches, the first she had seen. And then he took her to bed, — the poor, tired, trembling little thing!

Kate had not dared come forward, though she had been listening with senses wonderfully sharpened for so sluggish a temperament. Indeed, the scene before he went out had not been of the tranquil order.

Now he found her in the hall, her face almost as white as her dress.

“Dick, you didn’t —” she gasped.

"Shut your stupid head, or I'll murder you!" Dick flung out, savagely.

Yet he still felt the pressure of the soft cheek against his, and he saw in his dreams the beautiful, defiant, childish figure, as she had dared him to kill her.

CHAPTER X.

TITANIA.

"SIGNOR BARRETTI and Queen Titania, the wonderful Trapese performers." "Titania, the marvellous fairy child six years of age." "Titania, the fairy tight-rope dancer." Such were the flaming advertisements posted about a western city, and appended here and there, in staring block capitals, "Go to the Varieties."

The "Varieties" was one of the popular theatres of the season. There was always a farce, one of the merriest, maddest things, the wit dashed with broad allusions that never failed to bring down the house; there were two or three comic singers, who were irresistible; there was a handsome young actress, with matchless figure and limbs, who disported herself in the wildest of breakdowns and the most riotous of waltzes. And not least, Signor Barretti.

Last winter his foil had been Mademoiselle Violetta, a puny, automatic child. What had become of her the public did not ask. If they thought at all, they supposed her Queen Titania under the new name. But Barretti was always a favorite, and there were whispers that he and the child did some marvellous things, which meant that they risked life and limb for the brief nightly entertainment of their audience.

The house was full. A very fair house, too. Not altogether roughs or shop-girls, as you might suppose, but many well-dressed and well-looking men and women. To be sure, stowed away on the highest tier was a large sprink-

ling of the rather disreputable element; but they were obliged to behave themselves in an orderly manner.

They went through the farce, and were noisily applauded. The pretty actress sang her songs in a rather thin voice, but they were funny, and she was irresistible in the amusing scenes. There was a travesty of a popular opera, in which they were applauded and encored, and then the stage was cleared of trumpery.

Signor Barretti came forward with the small queen Titania. Setting her age back a year was not a sin that would lie heavily on his conscience, or a thing that the audience would question. Dressed for his performance, the symmetry, suppleness, and fine sinewy force came out boldly. The hair and beard cropped closely, yet with nothing of the bully in his mein. Indeed, at such times as these, the latent refinement and enthusiasm were visible in his countenance. To face an audience was a species of inspiration to him.

And Titania! She was holding tightly to one finger, a little abashed at the great multitude, her eyes downcast, and almost black in their lustrousness, her long fair hair gathered away from her face, but left floating at the back like the billows in a field of ripe wheat, while her splendid complexion of pink and pearl needed no stage disguises. Shapely as a nymph, or a sculptured cupid, the scanty drapery displaying the lovely roundness of the dimpled limbs. There were mothers of little girls looking on, fathers, brothers, yet to them she was only a thing for their amusement; not a casket wherein was shrined a woman's soul, a soul capable of sweetness, affection, truth, and purity, or a dangerous power in after years to strike back home, to draw into her bewildering, delusive net, husbands, brothers, sons; to pay in tears and anguish the plaudits of to-night, and all nights to come.

Her starry beauty enchanted. There was a breathless hush through the audience. She felt these merciless,

staring eyes, and her cheeks became the color of scarlet poppies, her small mouth quivered, the rosy lips parting, and her eyes blazed in the glare of light; nay, her very pulses throbbed to the rapturous, expectant welcome of applause.

Dick Bridger had been too wise to try her here for the first time. Her debut had been a week's engagement with a travelling circus. And at the very first appearance she had been seized with the awful terror of a stage fright, and done such discredit to Dick's training that —

To tell the truth, he would much rather never have struck the child again. He had come to experience a strange, absorbing tenderness since the night she had defied him in the barn. He would sooner have taken every blow himself.

And she knew now just what awaited a failure. Her brain was almost maddened with conflicting terrors, the fear of life and limb in those wild, dangerous exercises, and the other fear of cruel punishment. And joined with this an overwhelming love for Dick. The glance of his eye fascinated her as a serpent does a bird, ruled her, body and soul.

The performance began. The athlete's light sinuous curves, that brought out the quiver of playing muscles, now a long, lithe band just under the skin, now a ball of hard, knotted cord, holding himself by the tip of a finger, by the strength of an ankle, by the chin, vaulting, springing from height to height like a monkey in its native wilds, hanging head downward, with his arms crossed on his magnificent chest, as superbly indifferent as if he were lounging on a sofa, while rounds of applause sounded from pit to dome.

And Titania!

She was a bird, a butterfly, as her spangled garments caught the light, and glittered with sparkling rays. Her twinkling feet seemed at home anywhere, on the swaying rope, the slender rod, or his hand. All the while, with

that strange, entranced light in her face of roses and lilies, an expression that held her audience breathless with a peculiar fascination. Did they know that for her it was the awful mesmerism of fear? And if they had, they would still have clamored for amusement.

Last year it was Violetta; and who cared for dead Violetta now? Last year a wonderful starry-eyed girl had trod these boards, danced, sung, and been crowned with roses, to-day she was thrust into a hospital, to languish and die alone, friendless, and be buried in a Potter's field. And next year, Titania, with her radiant, flower-like face and sunny hair might be — where?

They did not ask. They had paid for their evening's entertainment. They might look at a swallow's long, daring curves in mid-air, at a fly when he walked the ceiling, at a spider who flings himself from branch to branch, or from some high house-top to the ground, the slender thread still in his grasp, and no emotion would be excited. But when human beings were unnaturally trained to imitate them all, if possible, the appreciative world clapped its hands.

"Let them dance and spring, so that they are brilliant and wonderful. What matter if to-morrow they die!"

So cries the cruel world, knowing not that it is cruel, caring not, so that it may laugh and applaud.

There was a silence presently. Signor Barretti stood, with one foot crossed over the other, in a handsome, indolent, audacious attitude, with a smile on his lips. Titania had disappeared. Then there was a stir and murmur up in the high gallery. Heads were turned, wonder was excited to its utmost. Something shone in the half dusk and dinginess, a small, dazzling figure. She clasped both small hands tightly over a ring, to which was attached a small, strong rope, the other end securely fastened high up above the stage curtain.

The hush was breathless, intense!

Swift as a bird she came through the air, her golden hair floating behind her like shadowy wings, her eyes burning with a strange, desperate glow, the very madness of hope and fear, — on, straight to Barretti's outstretched arms!

There was a perfect thunder of applause, that seemed to shake the very building. He did not dare turn that white, terror-stricken face to the audience. He felt the great frightened bounds of her heart, and murmured some tender, encouraging words in her ear.

It seemed as if they never would be done. It was waves on waves of sound, lulling a little, then tramping up on the beach of enthusiasm again.

"Let me stand you on the floor," he whispered, presently. "There is nothing more for you to do to-night, but you must turn and bow to the audience."

She clung to him, convulsively, for it seemed as if that awful sea of human heads still yawned before her, demanding some new effort.

"Turn and bow," he exclaimed in a voice of command, and she obeyed, while the soft pink wavered in her cheeks, and her eyes shone like points of lambent flame.

Once more the applause was tumultuous, and bowing, they withdrew.

But back of the stage stood another admiring crowd. Nymphs and shepherdesses in water-proofs, and hoods drawn over their heads, their startling loveliness much changed and faded.

"Oh, what an angel!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Vivienne. "Do let me give her a kiss;" and she darted forward, embracing the child rapturously. "Such magnificent hair! Is it all real? Oh, what a perfect little beauty. Barretti, I shall be mad with jealousy and rage!" and she laughed gaily. "We carried off the flowers to-night, but to-morrow night you'll be crowned, my lovely queen; never fear."

"Her dancing is perfection," cried another. "We must

look to our laurels. She isn't your own child, Barretti, is she?"

"Don't we look alike?" and he laughed good-naturedly.

"Well, you do, some; and she's supple as —"

"As an eel, or Barretti. You can't make a better comparison," declared Prince Azmor, who was now a rather effeminate, common-looking young man, in coat and trousers.

Kate pushed forward through the crowded green-room.

"Do let me see her, the little darling! I'm just dying to take her in my arms, and you wouldn't even let me kiss her before she went out. O my beautiful, beautiful Queen Titania! You were just magnificent! Wasn't it all splendid! and the applause, too!"

"But the flying leap! Barretti, you've made a big hit."

Barretti meanwhile had wrapped the child in a soft shawl, and still held her in his arms as the crowd pressed around with their expressions of wonder and extravagant praises. As soon as he could he shook off his warmest admirers, and bidding Kate follow, left the scene of confusion, understanding well how necessary rest and quiet was for his lovely little queen, who was trembling and throbbing in every pulse.

The hack in waiting soon conveyed them to their lodgings, in a retired part of the city. Kate always protested against his choice. She would have enjoyed the stir and bustle of a second-rate hotel, with a chance to disport herself in her finery to either envy or admiration. But the house was clean and quiet, the room spacious, warm, and fresh, with no scents of dead perfumes or smoke, or vile liquors.

Nora had recovered her self-possession somewhat, and was childishly eager to talk, and to know how it had all seemed to Kate, among the audience.

"And you were not alarmed, my beauty!" I just held my breath in that flying-leap. I was so afraid you would scream."

"She knew better than to scream," said Dick, in a pleasant tone, and yet it sent a shiver through her. Ah, she would not dare confess how near to it she had been. Yet, now that it was over, with the dim echoes of applause still sounding in her ears, her heart beat exultingly to the intoxicating spell. She had tasted the cup of stage fascination, and enjoyed it. To-morrow night she would be not only ready, but impatient. Indeed, she almost wished it was to do over immediately. The room looked so dull after all the stage glitter and brilliance.

She sat on Dick's knee, and prattled while she ate a few mouthfuls of a plain little lunch. But she was so brimming over with excitement that she was fairly radiant.

"But you must go to bed," declared Dick.

"Oh, I cannot sleep, I know," she replied. "Why, I don't feel as if I should ever, ever be sleepy again."

Her eyes looked like it. They were glowing stars.

"But you must, my little Queen, for to-morrow needs some strength as well as to-day. Get her ready, Kate."

She went pirouetting round the room in gay abandon, humming snatches of the waltz, and laughing. Now that Dick was satisfied with her she was perfectly happy.

He did not chide, yet carried her to bed in spite of her protestations.

"Oh, Dick, I can't sleep," she said, half an hour afterwards. "Won't you let me get up, and sit on your knee, while you and Kate talk?"

"My little girl, no. You *must* be quiet. Let me see, I'll read to you."

"Oh, a fairy story? But didn't they all look beautiful to-night, in their dresses of silver? I am so glad that I can see them again!"

"Not a fairy story to-night, my dear. Don't you remember how you liked the odd Indian poem I was reading the other day? You will be more likely to go to sleep, and to-morrow you shall have the other."

Queen Titania settled her golden head upon the pillow, and watched with eyes wide open, and unnaturally brilliant. The poem was *Hiawatha*. The musical cadence, and easy flowing repetitions, floated along like a babbling stream. Dick Bridger had a rich, mellow voice, and was a very fair reader, though he was not reading now for eloquence or finished style. The drowsy measure had its effect presently. The eyelids began to droop, the languor of repose came to the features, to the soft little hands. Indeed, more than once she seemed to have floated off to shadowy realms, but the cessation of his voice roused her, and she opened her eyes again.

"At last! And it is past midnight. What a little witch the child is!"

"And how you've humored her to-night," said Kate, impatiently. "I declare, there is no telling how you'll be. One time you half kill her, and now there's nothing too good."

"You are an idiot, Kate. I should like to see you train anything for the stage, or manage it, even if it were a hearth-brush. That child will be a splendid success. I should like to know what you would have done with her," — and he laughed contemptuously. "If I live, and she shows the slightest inclination, she shall be a first-class actress. None of your *Viviennes*, or *Helena*, or dancing dolls, but a first-class star. And she shall love me as if I were her own father."

"You had better go to bed," said Kate, crossly, with a twinge of foolish jealousy.

But he sat by the fire, and dreamed. Had he ever cared as much for any human thing as for this little girl?

"I'll make amends to her for everything," he said, softly. "She will see it all, sometime. And I'll keep her from the rabble, too. The child has good blood, let her be who she will."

For Queen Titania the engagement was a series of bril-

liant successes. The audience saved its choicest bouquets for her, and after the performance the green-room was thronged by curious visitors who wanted to look at the marvellous child, and who were entranced by her grace and beauty. She was learning one phase of stage manners rapidly. Already she had a naive self-possession, a readiness of reply akin to wit, and some touches of coquetry that are the natural concomitants of beauty, and an early induction into a world of flattery. The leading actresses besought Signor Barretti to bring her to some dainty supper, half given in her honor; and they vied with each other in gifts. Dick's engagement was lengthened past its first limit, until it was absolutely necessary to leave for a neighboring city.

And now she came heralded with fame. People crowded to see her. They held their breath when she made her daring leaps, they watched entranced as she sprang from point to point, as she danced on Dick's shoulder, or balanced herself on his hand. One spirit seemed to animate both. That she adored her master was evident, and that he idolized her was hardly less plain. So the rumor grew current that she was his own child, and no one would have questioned it seriously.

He kept her from the rough and dangerous side of stage association. She was a flower to be tenderly cared for, to be set in some choice parterre. Sometimes Kate rebelled, with a rather ugly show of jealousy; but a brooch, or a new gown brought her to a cheerful mood again, and in her way she did love the bewitching little queen.

Had the child forgotten Maggie and her dead mother? It was true, the many changes, and the absorbing scenes of her daily life, had well-nigh crowded them out. Her story had been so doubted and discredited that she more than half believed Maggie had left her purposely in the street. Her remembrance of Mother Mell still filled her with disgust.

The shy, shrinking child had changed greatly. The sacred veil of innocent childhood had been rudely rent asunder. Not so very long ago she had drawn back in affright from Dick's eyes when Kate had attired her in scanty stage-costume. But she had come to regard herself with a most unchildlike complacence, to exult at the thought of the round, graceful figure, the supple limbs. She had posed for several pictures; in fact, there was a perfect rage over the child by the fickle populace, who crown gods with gems and gold one day, and when they fail to please, thrust them aside for a new delight.

CHAPTER XI.

THE QUEEN OF THE RING.

"COME Larry, come! You are the very quintessence of laziness, as was your namesake before you. Aunt Alice, how did you come to hit the nail on the head when you named him?"

Mrs. Byington glanced up with a motherly smile, her needle, with its brilliant floss silk, suspended in mid-air.

"Really, Roger —"

"Oh, Lal, your slow, musical voice is lazy. You ought to have been born a lizard or a water-spider, so that you could have sunned yourself on some sandy beach, with the croon of the ocean forever in your ears. You promised to go, too;" and there was a ring of petulance in the voice.

"I know it, Roger, but I told you I had no fancy for such amusements. And if you would let me stay at home —"

The speaker was lying indolently on a broad, low couch, by an open window. There was a long reach of sand, an eighth of a mile or more, between him and the sea, — the calm, pale-green sea, that lay surging in slow musical swells, breaking with hardly a sparkle in the yellow afternoon sunshine. Over the window was stretched an awning, with a green lining, that gave a peculiar cool and shady tone to the room. His arms were folded under him, and served to raise his shoulders, while his eyes were fixed on the book he was reading, which, in truth, he was loth to leave. A youth of seventeen, or thereabout, somewhat slender and pale, with fair hair, and an extremely sweet, rather than handsome face.

The room was spacious and summery, in cool matting

cane and bamboo furniture, and lounges covered with light, gay chintzes. Mrs. Byington was at another window, making a pretence of embroidering, while near her sat a grave-looking girl, busy with some fine mending. The only other occupant was a round, rosy, gay-looking, restless lad, who was pacing up and down, with the ends of his fingers thrust daintily in his pockets.

"But I want to go, and I have set my heart upon going. And that wonderful trapeze-performer, Barretti, is to be with the crowd. I've never seen him, you know."

"Neither have I; and if I never did I should hope to live all the same."

"You haven't a bit of enthusiasm, Lal, except over a tough Greek root, or somebody's journey to the moon. And the show is to be grand beyond compare! Why, the animals alone will be a sight. I should think you would want to see them. And then there is to be some magnificent riding. I haven't outgrown my childhood's love of a circus. Aunt Alice, suppose you go; that will infuse a little energy into Lal."

Mrs. Byington smiled again.

"I am afraid, Roger, that I never had any great love for such performances. Generally, the beasts have to be pricked and goaded into the semblance of animation; the riding is dangerous, and fills me with dread, and I am always thinking of the possible accidents. Suppose, Roger —"

"Not a suppose in the case, auntie. I am bound to go if I should go afoot and alone. Hillo! There's Master George."

"Come," began George, as he rushed in like a whirlwind, "are you not ready? The stage is to start in just fifteen minutes, and there is to be a procession of hotel hacks. Mamma, suppose you go, too?"

"I've been trying to coax her, George."

"Won't you? Oh, please do? And let's take Maggie."

Wouldn't you like to go to the most magnificent circus in the world, Maggie?"

"I have seen several in my day," returned Maggie, quietly.

"Aunt Alice," said Roger, with a laugh, "doesn't Maggie talk as if she had come out of the ark. Her day, indeed! As if you had gone into a convent, and your days were about finished, turned into night. But we can't stay fooling around, George. We must brush up, and make ourselves beautiful."

"Then I cannot induce you to stay at home?" and Aunt Alice used her most persuasive tone.

"See here, auntie, this was all planned, cut and dried, a week ago, when we saw the first poster. And if Lal *will* back out —"

"Roger, I really do not feel equal to that ride, in this broiling sun. If you will be induced to excuse me."

"Oh, stay at home if you want to," returned Roger, pettishly, rushing up-stairs for a few toilet touches.

"The boys will be perfectly safe, I suppose?" Mrs. Byington inquired, apprehensively.

"Oh, mother dear, Roger is older than I, and George never pays the slightest heed to what I say when he is by. And to do Roger justice, he never forgets that he is a gentleman, born and bred, when there is a necessity for his remembering it. I do not feel equal to the exertion this warm day, and the pleasure would only be tiresome to me. But they will enjoy it."

At this juncture they came down, ready.

"I do so wish you were going, auntie; but you and Lal must comfort each other in our absence. Good-by."

"Try and not run into any danger, George. Do be careful, Roger," said the motherly voice.

"I have no ambition to ride the trick mule," laughed Roger, from the window, outside.

The room settled into quiet again. Lawrence turned

his leaves slowly, Mrs. Byington fell into a kind of dream, and Margaret Donald went on with her mending. The murmurous rythm of the sea seemed to throb on the summer air, in which burned sultry August heats.

Margaret had become a kind of companion to Mrs. Byington. The interest, hope, disappointment, and grief they had shared together had brought them to a peculiar equality of feeling, though their social relations were those of mistress and maid. But Margaret had proved herself sensible, companionable, and the boys liked her wonderfully, considering how grave she always was now.

All efforts to find Nora had been unavailing. Mell Chafney could have put them on the right track, but she was too angry with Retzer to throw the reward in his way. He had not troubled himself about the child's name, and if he had seen the advertisement would not have connected it with Mell's little stray. Kate Bridger seldom looked into a paper, and Nora's story was not one to arouse any curiosity on Dick's part. To him she was simply one of many little waifs, who might congratulate herself, as years went on, that she had fallen into such good hands.

If either of the women had dreamed she was so near to them this summer day; that half of Seaview was to look upon that beautiful, longed-for face! Why was there not a presentiment in the very air?

Mrs. Byington's brother-in-law, the husband of her dead sister, had, a few months before, claimed her motherly sympathy for his son. He had become president of a large mining company in California, and had resolved to spend the next five years on the spot. His beautiful Maryland home had been rented, his son was to enter the same college with his cousin, the ensuing fall, and for some time Roger Lasselle's home would be with the Byingtons. So it had been considered best to take a pleasant sea-side cottage for the whole summer, and here the boys disported themselves at their pleasure. At little distances along the

beach were various small settlements, while two miles farther back was quite a flourishing town. It was here, at Branchville, that the grand entertainment of the season was to be given. An unusually fine menagerie, containing some well-known trained animals, one of the celebrated bands of the day, and several of the most accomplished equestriennes, besides the trapeze performer, Signor Barretti, and the wonderful child Queen Titania.

The town had been thronged all day. Women and children had come in from the outskirts to the afternoon performance, it being more convenient than that in the evening. And Mrs. Byington had stipulated that the boys should attend the first, and thus be enabled to return home early.

They were in high spirits. Indeed, Mrs. Byington found Roger quite an addition to her cares. He was not a bookworm, like Lawrence, but a laughing, mischievous, irrepressible boy, whom George admired and copied continually. Nearly eighteen, healthy, handsome, and bright, he kept the house in a continual stir.

"I believe it is my fate to have all sons, and no daughters," Mrs. Byington said to her husband, with a faint smile.

"But if she were a Miss Lasselle, think how attached to her you would become in five years. And then the parting!" was his half-grave, half-humorous reply.

When the sun had gone down, Lawrence and his mother went to walk upon the beach, and plunged into one of their interminable talks, as Roger styled them. The boy adored his mother. He had been strangely interested, too, in all that had concerned Nora. Circumstances seemed destined to keep the incidents alive. Mr. Byington had deemed it best, when six months elapsed, to acquaint the father of little Elsinore with the sad tidings. He begged them to continue the search, but they could think of nothing else to do.

Maggie had already given her up for dead. It did not seem possible to her that she could be alive, and not found somewhere. Homes and institutions were searched, but vainly. She accepted the sad fate with a quiet despair that often made Mrs. Byington's heart ache.

Now, as twilight came on, she arranged the supper-table, lighted the lamps, and then sat out on the porch to watch, while the mother and son walked up and down, listening. Presently, the crunch of wheels was heard, and a commingling of many merry voices. The stage stopped, and the two boys sprang out.

"Oh, auntie, if you only had gone!" and Roger threw his arms around her neck, kissing her soft pink cheek. "Why, the riding excited me so I had half a mind to apply for a position straightway! The vaulting was superb, and the bare-back riding just magnificent! Such splendid animals, trained to a thought, it seems to me. Do you know, I *did* want to stay in the evening, but there was my promise to you."

"And I am glad you had the strength of mind to keep your word. I should have been worried."

"I never broke a solemn promise in my life, — papa can tell you that, — and I should be a boor to break one to a woman;" he said with a graceful assumption of chivalry, while his eyes sparkled. "But wasn't it hard to tear ourselves away, George?"

"Alas! alas! mother why are you so worried when we are home with you! Think of the weeks and months when you hear only what we send in a letter. Yet you trust us then not to run into dangers."

"I know you are safe at school, and that your teachers are caring for you. Beside, George, I think even at school you have some regard for your father's wishes, and mine;" and she glanced up with a trustful smile.

"Dear mamma, yes. And I should hope to have as much regard elsewhere; this afternoon, for instance."

"I suppose, George," and she twined her soft fingers in his curly hair, "we mothers as a general thing are afraid of strong temptations. Very few boys set out deliberately to do wrong, and break their parents' hearts. Only there comes some irresistible wave, and the boy yields this once, thinking he will never do it again. But frequently no ill consequences follow the first step, and he is emboldened to go on until the results *are* most dangerous."

"But, auntie," said Roger, "there wasn't the slightest danger this afternoon. In the first place, the entertainment, and the people connected with it, were most reputable, and the audience comprised the guests about here, whom we meet daily. Then the performance was mostly feats of skill and daring, the result of the best and finest training. Men who do such things must be clear-headed, and of steady nerves, and — well, I suppose you will think me a little cracked on the subject of physical training, but you see papa believed in it so strongly. I've ridden almost everything, and had a gymnasium ever since I could remember. Papa had a horror of a boy being a molly-coddle. And I couldn't help being stirred and inspired this afternoon, and all the blood in my veins took a race. And when that Barretti came on the stage —"

"But the child!" interrupted George. "Oh, mamma, you never saw anything so beautiful! A bit of a fairy, with great black eyes and long golden hair — the most beautiful hair in the world, I think, shining just like threads of silk. Why, you can scarcely believe it is a real child."

"A little girl, too," said Mrs. Byington, pityingly.

"But she is with her father — isn't it her father, Roger, don't you think?"

"Why — I suppose he may be, though it had not occurred to me before. They do look alike, that is, they are both fair, and Barretti's hair is not very dark. And then, she loves him so. Oh, auntie, it was really worth while to

go, just to see them. He is so proud of her, and she just worships him. And her feats are enough to take your breath away."

"Well, let us come to supper," exclaimed Lawrence, "and hear the rest at the table. Just see — it is eight o'clock."

They took their seats, and Maggie came in to wait upon them. She was so quiet and refined that she seldom seemed any restraint to the conversation.

Roger continued, warming with his theme, George breaking in, now and then, to the full as enthusiastic. Barretti's perfection of figure, muscle, training, and achievements, mingled with Queen Titania's graces, and wonderful performances.

"There always will be a great charm about athletic sports," said Mrs. Byington. "And yet, I cannot help but think of the stories of cruel training that come to light now and then, of poor little children maimed or killed by a fatal fall. I do not expect to convert the world to my way of thinking, and yet it seems as if I should 'have sat in dread for the fate of your beautiful little Queen Titania. If she were my little girl, nay, suppose she were even this little Elsinore, whose fate we have all been so interested in, would we be willing for a moment to leave her there? Would we think it a fitting life for her?"

"Why, of course not," returned Roger, "but on the other hand you might not care to adopt Barretti's daughter, and bring her up as a sister to Lal and George."

"I'd consent in a minute," declared George. "Why, mother, she's handsomer than that picture, ever so much. Where is it? You never saw it, Roger, did you?"

"No, but I'd like to. There couldn't be anything lovelier than Barretti's daughter. And she's such a mite! Do you know, if ever I have an opportunity, I mean to get acquainted with that Barretti."

"You must make allowance for stage glamour," said Lawrence, gravely.

"Let us have the picture, and decide. Can Maggie get it? I have almost forgotten," said George. "This little Nora, as Maggie calls her, had light curls."

"And lovely dark-brown eyes, which is quite an unusual combination. I am sorry we cannot have it just now; but when I was packing up the silver, to send to the bank, I put in a case of my jewels that I did not care to bring with me, and the miniature was with them. Maggie is so afraid now that it will be lost, that I sometimes feel quite nervous about it. We want to keep it for the father."

"Then I shall have no rival in my first love," said Roger, laughing. "I am positively smitten, aunt, by the radiant beauty of this little queen. When I take my college degree I shall turn knight-errant, and hunt her up."

"I hope she will have been crowded out of your mind long before that."

Margaret had been out of the room during the latter part of the conversation, and now they turned from Queen Titania to athletic sports in general, and in all ages. Mrs. Byington quoted the Dacian Gladiator.

"'Butchered to make a Roman Holiday;'"

but Roger laughingly declared that Barretti was a great and enjoyable modern improvement on the sports of those old days.

Yet the race of prize-fighters is not quite extinct. I cannot believe a man's glory lies chiefly in the cultivation of mere brute strength and agility.

While they talked through the quiet evening, fanned by the cool murmurous breezes of the sea, Queen Titania, in the midst of heat and glare, listened to the rapturous applause with a pleased, yet throbbing heart, finding her most gratifying commendation in Dick's face. For she had come to love him with a passionate fervor that most

people translated as an evidence of the relationship between them.

Not even her wildest fancy could have imagined Maggie so near; the Maggie who now was but a memory. Perhaps she would hardly have exchanged her present life, with its excitement, gaiety, and many enchanting phases, for the quiet of the seaside cottage, and friends who were all strange to her. But so near had they come, — and yet there might be a whole lifetime between!

For days Seaview, and indeed all the small points along the shore, discussed warmly and eagerly the wonders and accomplishments of the Troupe; then a new excitement took its place, and presently summer ended. Lawrence and Roger said their good-byes, and departed for Harvard; and George returned to his school. The Byingtons went the even tenor of their way, prospering, and with few changes. The following summer Mr. Lasselle sent for Roger and Lawrence to meet him in California, and take a tour through the wonders of the famed State. They were both growing into fine young men. Larry's steadiness, and studious ways, exerted a beneficial influence over Roger, who was eager, impetuous, and with a facile, pleasure-loving temperament, though he possessed a good deal of pride and ambition to excel. Mr. Lasselle congratulated himself that Roger had fallen into such good hands.

Another year of study followed this, rather severer than the first, but both boys acquitted themselves creditably. Boys, indeed! Mrs. Byington looked at them in amaze as they presented themselves for her welcome. Roger was nearly twenty now, a tall, bright, vivacious youth, full of life and energy, his very face inspiring, with its brilliant dark eyes, its clear complexion, the creamy tint not so dark as olive, in fine contrast with the rose-hued cheeks. A dainty suggestion of mustache shaded his lip, and his broad chin was cleft with a dimple. A great favorite with girls was Mr. Roger Lasselle.

Lawrence Byington was as tall, but much slenderer; and it seemed now as if there might be a year instead of six months difference in their ages, if you judged by the face alone. Lawrence was fair, with deep, thoughtful, gray eyes, and a more intellectual cast of countenance, with much of his mother's grave sweetness. But he still kept the quiet ascendancy over his cousin that had been noticeable from the first.

"How delightfully home-like this is," Roger said after the late dinner, as he stretched himself out on the luxurious couch in his aunt's sitting-room. "I am tired to death with my year's digging and delving in the gardens of other men's minds; now isn't that a neat sentiment? Sometimes I wish I had not gone to Harvard, for you must know that I should be quite ashamed to lag much behind Lal, and he is such a sixty-horse power student. Look at his pale face, and the careworn line between his brows, and I half believe he has tried to work my roses into pale shadows, out of pure envy."

"You have not lost very much, I think," said his aunt with fond pride. "But Lal does look as if he needed a little seaside, or mountains, or something."

"If papa had his country's good at heart he would ask us to California again. We did not half see it last summer. But I feel now as if I could spend a week on this lounge, and have every meal brought to me."

Maggie came in at this juncture, and lighted up. Roger had been playing idly with his aunt's rings as he held her hand, but now he gave a sudden start.

"What is that picture over yonder, Aunt Alice,—that child? Some of the Byington nieces?"

"That?" and she followed the direction of his eyes. "Oh, no. That is our romance. I wrote to Lawrence, I think, that the father of the little lost Elsinore came to America in the winter. He is an artist of considerable

merit, and painted that picture from two likenesses in Maggie's charge, and her description of the child."

"Is that really it?" and Lawrence sprang up to inspect the portrait. "O yes, I remember now. What a lovely face the child has!"

Roger joined him. "I never saw the picture, you know: it was packed up somewhere when you were at Seaview."

"He painted it as he fancied she would look now. He copied the portrait, too, and gave me my choice; but I preferred this. We liked him so much, your uncle insisted upon his being our guest for a while. He has had such a romantic, eventful history, and has twice been a political prisoner. Now he has succeeded to a very comfortable fortune, and the title of baron, but he would willingly give up everything if he could have his wife and child instead."

"A real baron! Why, mamma, you were quite honored," said Lawrence, with a smile.

"Oh, why didn't we have a marriageable sister?" exclaimed George. "Baroness Waldeburgh! Wouldn't that sound grand!"

"And where is he now?" asked Lawrence.

"He has gone to Rome, and will probably spend some years there, engaged with his art. He is an elegant and cultivated gentleman. I thought, at first, that Maggie's heart would break. She blames herself so for the loss of Nora, and I feel as if we, too, had been the unwitting instruments of a great and life-long sorrow."

"How curious that we should have been brought in contact with these strangers," said Lawrence. "You remember that George and I were in Canada, with Aunt Keith, that summer. We thought you never would come, and were so disappointed at having to visit the places of note without you. And there has not been the slightest clew discovered?"

"No. The child must be dead. She was old enough,

you see, to tell her name, and give some account of herself. If she only had staid a few days longer with those miserable people we should have found her; but I suppose she set off to find Maggie, and God only can tell the rest. But another odd little incident has grown out of it. The boy who first found her, Tim Chafney by name, quite interested your father, and he provided him some employment for a while. It seems the father belonged to a gang of burglars, and was caught, and sent to prison, and the mother — or Tim's stepmother she was — plunged into the depths of vice. At the desire of Mr. Waldeburgh, your father found Tim again, and he is now apprenticed to a machinist. If he behaves himself well and is steady, he will have five hundred dollars when he is twenty-one. He seems a bright, ambitious lad, and Mr. Waldeburgh appears to have great sympathy for him."

Roger had been studying the portrait all this while. Now he turned, with a puzzled face :

"I can't make it out, Aunt Alice, but I am sure I have seen that child somewhere. I can always connect faces so easily, too; but this floats in my mind like a dream.

"There are a good many children who might look something like it. And I'll tell you one. Don't you remember Phil Gray's little niece that he is so proud of?"

"Mrs. Barringer's child? Yes, in the connection of having dark eyes and light hair. But this is a nobler face."

"Idealized, probably."

"It has a good deal the expression of the child's father. And see! here is a photograph, and here a baby ambrotype. You can see the likeness running through all."

Roger went back to his lounge. Mr. Byington came in, and the conversation turned on what they should do during the summer vacation, as the best way of gaining strength and vigor. Roger came out now and then with a bright rejoinder, but soon lapsed into silence again.

Every time he entered his aunt's room the likeness

haunted him. What was it? Who was it? Surely he had seen something wonderfully like this in the flesh. The eyes had flashed, the lips smiled.

"Hallo, George!" he cried, a few days afterward, starting up suddenly, "I've found it, solved the mystery. Don't you remember that wonderful little queen Titania we saw at Branchville? This picture might have been painted from her."

"Why, yes; I never thought of her."

"I so seldom forget a face! Oh, Lal, I wish you had gone that day, or aunt, or Maggie! I wish some one else had seen her. Why, the likeness would have startled you. Just that same high-bred air, as if the world was hardly good enough. And that reminds me, what has become of her? Does anybody know?"

"She was advertised to act somewhere the first of the winter. I don't remember, but I saw it in some paper."

"Your hero, Barretti, came to grief, as I suppose you know?" said Aunt Alice.

"No? what?" inquired Roger, all interest.

"Why, I think it was not long after our return from Seaview. Uncle Edward read it among the casualties. Do you not remember that I wrote to ask if either of you boys had taken your pistols with you?"

"Yea," and Roger laughed. "Dear auntie, you are always conjuring up dangers."

"Well, that put it in my mind. It seems Signor Barretti and some others were examining a pistol. I may not remember it exactly, but some of the party said it was not loaded with a ball, and snapped it, when the whole charge entered Barretti's side. It did not kill him instantly, but I am quite sure he died from the wound. And I have always had such a dread of fire-arms!"

"But if she was Barretti's child," interposed George, "she could not be 'Lost Lenore, the rare and radiant maiden'?"

"Poor Barretti," said Roger, in tones of deepest sympathy. "And he was such a splendid fellow as to physique. He must have been tender of his child, or she would not have loved him so. I suppose she was his child, but the resemblance is wonderful, is it not, George?"

George was trying, in true boy fashion, to convince his mother that pistols were not necessarily dangerous, but very useful. One must needs be careful, and all these accidents were the result of sheer carelessness. So Roger dreamed over the picture and wondered. If the child were Barretti's own, was she still performing? And if not, he was wiser now than he had been two years ago. With added experience, he felt that the ring of a circus, or the stage of a popular theatre, *was* a dangerous place for a beautiful child.

Roger Lasselle had a vein of romantic chivalry. It wasn't at all likely that Queen Titania, and this lovely child, Elsinore, was the same, and everybody was interested in the latter, while Titania had hardly a thought. But he meant to find her, and to keep watch over her destiny. He had a generous father, and plenty of money at his command, and he would work in secret, saying nothing until there was some story to tell.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THIS SIDE QUEENIE, ON THAT SIDE DICK.

It was true that Signor Barretti, with his perfect health, his splendid training and physique, and the strength that might have made an octogenarian of him, had been sent out of life by a careless hand. The pistol had not been pointed at him : it had been a pure accident, yet one of the incidents that happen so frequently, and fail to teach human nature wisdom.

Titania, — Kate loftily ignored any other name, “for Nora, you must admit, sounds very much like Irish,” she said to the little girl, — Titania was shocked and stunned by the blow. At the second examination the doctor had pronounced it a mortal wound, though from the very strength of his constitution he might linger a week, perhaps. He did more. There were twelve days of intense, excruciating suffering, many hours of delirium, but in his sane moments he could not endure the child out of his sight. She sat perched up on the bed, holding his hand, or smoothing his brow, or perhaps pressing her soft cheek against his, so throbbing and fevered. All the while there was a strange, questioning terror in her eyes. Her own mother’s death had fallen so far into the background that she could only remember a white, hushed face and folded hands. But how could she live without Dick? Who would love her and care for her, take her to ride, bring her dainties, wrap her up nice and warm, read her to sleep when she was tired, when every joint in her body ached? Young as she was, she understood that Dick was her protector. No one was allowed to tease or torment her, she was kept alike

from Kate's foolish indulgence and selfish tyranny. She loved Kate, too; but she seemed to have an intuitive perception of her ill-judgment, her weakness and vanities. Her very training had given her a precocious maturity of decision, a stern and upright strength of mind. And by nature she was both truthful and honest. She saw through Kate's petty subterfuges and deceits, when simple truth would have answered the purpose better.

Dick was so hopeful for the first week that no one had the courage to tell him that the wound was mortal. It was only when he felt himself growing weaker, and knew that the paroxysms of delirium were more violent, that he began to suspect the end might be near.

And then his heart filled with an overwhelming love and pity for Titania. He had paid so little attention to her story in the beginning; but he wondered now, in a vague, desultory manner, if the child really had a father somewhere? How he would love her if he came to know her, the brave little beauty! Must he leave her to stage life and associations, with no better hands than Kate's to guard and guide her? It began to trouble him sorely.

"Kate," he said, in one of his lucid moments, "I would like to see a lawyer, I want to settle my affairs to my mind."

"Yes," answered Kate, weeping at this sign of approaching death. "Who would you like, Dick?"

His mind began to waver again. "Send for little Queenie's father. He ought to have her, Kate."

Queen Titania looked with wild, astonished eyes.

"But you said my own papa was dead!" she exclaimed.

"Is he dead? I don't know, Kate," and he attempted to rise, suddenly, but fell back on the pillow again. "I must do something for her. If I could get well she might make her own fortune you see, but I don't know who to trust her with. She is so young, so lovely."

"As if you couldn't trust me," cried Kate. "Why, I

love the child as my own. I'm sure I should be as good to her as you are."

"It was not that. Let me see, what did I mean? She ought to have some money, Kate. I must fix it so — you are not a wise or prudent woman, Kate."

Kate Bridger was grandly huffed at this.

"I am as wise as most people," she cried indignantly, her face scarlet.

"My poor little Queenie, my darling Queenie," and he clutched at the small hand. "There's nothing to be afraid of. There, swing off, so! You go like a bird. In two years time there will not be your equal on the stage. And you are mine, mine! my own little girl. I love you, Queenie. Kiss me my darling. Don't hold anger against me. Ah, do you remember when you ran away? You have a brave, strong, splendid nature, child. If you were a woman — ah, hear the encores! Have they smothered you with flowers, my darling!"

And so on, and on, until the doctor came, leaving an anodyne for him, and shaking his head, then going out softly. Other people coming in, looking at him, and at the white, tearless, quiet child who held his hand, and would hardly be persuaded to leave him for an instant. Kate experienced a bitter jealousy. She could not send Titania away, but she hated to see her there, taking Dick's last kisses.

The lawyer came at one of his wildest moments.

"He certainly is not capable of doing any business, was the decisive comment. "Did he ever make a will, to your knowledge?"

"He did, once," answered Kate. "It was long ago. He had a wretched, intemperate brother, and he declared that David never should have a penny of his; but poor Davy died, and Dick buried him, and all that. The papers are at our house, on Long Island. Dick has a safe there, built in a closet. No one would ever suspect."

"Then I think it is best not to worry him. You and your child will be all right anyhow. The law will take care of that. Doctor Sayre said he could not last twenty-four hours. What a pity! Such a magnificent physique as the man had! Fire-arms and kerosene are two enemies of the human race, and yet people go on hugging them to their bosoms as dearest friends, instead of holding them at arm's length, as enemies. Well, if he *can* see me in any rational moment I shall be glad to come, but I wouldn't disturb him."

Kate nodded, and wiped a tear from the corner of her eye. After all, what right had this little beggar, picked out of the street, to Dick's money? She had taken his love, she should not have everything.

For the last forty-eight hours Dick was wandering among the scenes of the past, or in a stupor from opiates given to dull the excruciating pain. Titania slept beside him on the bed, ate the delicacies prepared for him, and resisted every attempt to remove her, always seconded by Dick, who appeared to understand this when he had forgotten all other things.

Just at dusk he roused himself.

"Where have I been, Kate? Was it a fall, or fever? Why, I am weak as a baby. Titania, my darling, what have you been doing? You are white as a ghost, and your great brown eyes browner than ever. Did we finish the engagement? I can't remember. What are you crying for, Kate?"

There was no answer.

The puzzled brows knit thoughtfully, and there came a kind of wild terror in the eyes.

"Good God!" he cried. "Am I dying, Kate? Oh, I remember now. Heaven help me. Oh, my little darling! Be good to her, Kate. Don't ever let —"

There was a gasp and a shiver. The hands clutched at vacancy with a deathly strength, and then dropped.

"Oh, Dick! Dick!" the child cried in accents of woe, pressing her cheek against his. "Dear Dick!"

And in that close embrace they were found, when Kate, in wild fear, summoned the gossiping nurse from her retreat in the kitchen. They carried Titania away by sheer force, put her to bed and locked her in the room; and there the poor child battled many hours with a new and nameless horror.

She did not see Dick again until he was dressed and in his coffin. Wasted by the pain and suffering, and yet all the latent nobleness came out in these still, white features. Kate was gratified with the admiring glances bestowed, the honors and attention paid both him and her. She sat there in her heavy mourning, her long veil flowing around her, crying into her deep-black bordered handkerchief, yet secretly proud of this great assembly, these mourning badges, the music, the stately procession. But Titania, who had had several fits of passionate, convulsive weeping, was dry-eyed now.

Had Dick gone to heaven, and would he see her own dear mamma? Oh, why had she not sent some message? And she wondered now why no one ever prayed to God any more. She did not even say a prayer night and morning. Why was everything so different from the days of her mother and Maggie? Why had Maggie wanted to be her mamma? Would anybody love her as Dick had loved her? Would she go on the stage any more? What was this awful weight about her heart, and why could she not cry when her eyes ached so?

The lid was closed, and Dick borne away to Greenwood. She sat in the close coach beside Kate, with two gentlemen opposite. It was a cold day. No flowers, no waving green trees, nothing but a dull, gray shadow, in which these people looked like phantoms. She was glad to get back to the warm hotel parlor with Kate.

And poor Dick left lying alone there! Would he be

cold, or tired, or hungry, or lonesome? What happened when people died? If they could only come back by and by.

She sat there quietly thinking her own strange puzzling thoughts. A gentleman who had been very kind to Kate had come in to supper with her, Mr. Gilbert Chippenham, a young man of artistic tastes, who wrote poems, and had produced a play or two, who acted occasionally when he could get an engagement that suited, and for the rest, lived by his wits. He was of average height, but rather slender, with dark curling locks and a thin pale face, intellectual in his estimation. The world had given him scant appreciation, he thought, but he managed to dress well, and often fared sumptuously at other people's expense. He had dangled in the train of several rising actresses, and made love to a score of others, but nothing just suitable in the matrimonial line had come within his reach.

"If you want a friend, or a favor, Madame Barretti, don't hesitate to call upon me," he said, with his most gracious air, as he rose to depart.

She always felt elated to be called Madame Barretti.

"I am sure I don't know what to do, and it will be very good to have a friend to call on. Dick always managed everything himself. He insisted that I had no head for business; but I don't see then why a man can't instruct his wife. I shall stay in the city for some time to come, and I am sure I shall be glad to see you as often as you have time to drop in. I shall miss Dick dreadfully. We were always on the go, and I like changing about."

"Good-night, little Queen Titania. I suppose it will be some time before we see you on the boards again? Haven't you a kiss for me?"

The child pushed away his face, and her eyes flashed, though she said nothing.

"Good-night, my dear madame," and he bowed low over

the lady's hand. "Remember your promise. I shall be glad to serve you."

So Signor Barretti, being in the grave, soon passed out of mind. His place was filled by another, though a few of his feats remained unattainable to his would-be successors. But the world had to be amused, and could not stop to moan over its dead favorite.

Gilbert Chippenham speculated somewhat on the vacancy. Professionally he had no desire of filling it, but was there not another way in which he might succeed, quite to his expectations? What with the property and a life insurance, Madame Barretti was not such a poor prize. The fact of her being five or six years his senior was nothing to him, and she would, no doubt, be delighted with the attentions of a good-looking young man. In his heart he knew she was weak and easily flattered, and he might as well have the money as any other man. So he became quite assiduous in his attentions, and she confided her business troubles to his keeping. There was a will made some ten years before, which gave everything to her.

Madame Barretti was so delighted with her liberty, that after a month or so she scarcely regretted Dick. She went to a stylish, but rather second-rate, hotel, and had Dick's handsome team stabled in the city. As for living on that dreary farm, with a man and a maid, she should never think of that again.

"I should offer it for sale," advised Mr. Chippenham. *He* would never care to live there either.

Madame Barretti drove through Broadway, Fifth Avenue, and frequented the Park, with her pretty adopted daughter by her side, who had come to be considered Dick's daughter, but not hers. It was her great amusement, for in her heavy sables she could not seek congenial society.

Deep mourning makes a fright of nearly every one," she declared to Titania. "When spring fairly opens I shall

take to lilac. I wonder if it would do for me to wear my diamonds? They are not exactly color, like rubies, you know, and I hate all this black jewelry."

Titania stared a little. Kate was used to asking advice on subjects quite beyond the child's comprehension. So much black was not cheerful, most assuredly. It would be pleasant to go to the theatre again, to be asked out to dainty suppers, and have the stir of active life.

Titania enjoyed it; how could she help when it had been daily food. Yet she indulged in moments of passionate weeping for Dick, when Kate was out of sight. Though too young to discriminate, she felt, and vaguely understood, the shallowness of Kate's nature. Already Titania had grown prematurely wise in some respects.

"I may as well tell you," began Kate, as they were sunning themselves in the Park one brilliant morning, late in May, "that I am engaged;" and a conscious smirk overspread her face. "Mr. Chippenham asked me last night."

"Oh!" Titania cried, and it was like a sound of pain. Could Dick be so soon forgotten?

Kate looked surprised.

"You don't seem to like him very much, and yet it is really ungrateful in you, Titania. I am sure he does a great many nice things for you; and he adores me. I suppose I did love Dick when I first married him, but he was always very masterful, and thought I did not know anything. Now dear Gilbert is so different. He always consults me, and calls me an angel instead of a fool. And he wants to be married very soon. He doesn't consider it worth while to wait a whole year."

"And you are going to put him in Dick's place — give him all Dick's money, love him, and kiss him;" — and Titania's eyes dilated with something like horror, as well as disgust.

"How you do talk! You forget that I love him," said Kate, much aggrieved.

"It is very strange," faltered Titania, turning away to hide her tears.

"Why, no, it isn't strange at all. You are a little girl, and don't know anything about love. But you are so pretty that you will soon have lovers of your own. I wish you could grow tall faster. And about the money, — Gilbert isn't going to take it, under any circumstances. It is to be all settled on myself, and I am to give him power of something, — I've forgotten what, — and he is to invest it, and pay me the interest. And so we are going right on to sell everything. I think we shall go to Paris for our bridal tour."

Titania said no more, but Kate rambled on in her foolish fashion, supremely happy and content. The child wondered why she should have disliked Mr. Chippenham so, from the very first, and she experienced an undefined misgiving for Kate. Of herself she scarcely thought.

Kate had received one very advantageous offer for her, a fortnight after Dick's death; but, to her credit, she had refused it. Dick had loved the child so well that she seemed a sacred trust to her. But to Mr. Chippenham nothing had any sacredness. He viewed Titania as a part of the property the dead man had left.

Altogether he was quite elated with his engagement. Kate was somewhat older than himself, and lacked the refinement of taste that he admired in a woman; but she was easily flattered and easily led, and there was the money. He was quite surprised when he came to learn the amount. Kate trusted him implicitly. One of the executors of the will was dead, the other declined serving, so the whole business fell to Kate and her lover. There would be no check to the ignorance of the one, or the selfish cupidity of the other.

And Gilbert Chippenham determined to become a great man. Hitherto he had been repressed, and not appreciated. A winter in Paris, with certain stage associations, would

give him position. Managers would not dare snub him after that, and with a bound he expected to leap into the arena of fame.

The farm and its belongings were disposed of, and certain stocks turned into ready money. Kate and Titania went to Saratoga, but it was early in the season, and Madame Barretti did not seem to take among these people.

"They are a stupid, stuck-up set," she declared to Titania. "I am not sure but I should like Long Branch better. If Gilbert could only be with us all the time."

Then dear Gilbert began to importune for a speedy marriage. Why should they wait and wait! She had no relatives to consult.

"Of course we must take Titania to Paris with us," said Kate.

They were walking up and down the beach in the moonlight, Kate in a very romantic mood.

"Well —" returned Gilbert, slowly, "I wanted a little talk about the child. I think she would be very much in the way. I desire no one but you, my dear Kate. I should really be jealous to see you devote so much of your precious time and love upon her when you are my wife. And then it would be lonesome for her without any companionship. Altogether it is not practicable, as you must see."

"But what could I do with her? And Dick charged me especially to look after her."

"I think he meant to have you go on with her training. He prepared her for the stage, and she is capable of taking a position that will lead to fame and fortune. If you keep her back two or three years, you see she will lose what she has already acquired. In justice to her, you should make some engagement for her."

"But if she should not like it?" questioned Kate, simply.

"Oh, if you are going to give in to a child's whims, you will make yourself trouble enough. She may not want to go on the stage just now, after such a lazy, luxurious life

as you two have been indulging in; but a few years hence she will turn and blame you for not giving her the opportunity. You ought to put her in the way of making a fortune for herself."

"If I only knew what Dick would like for her!"

"Why, he would have kept her on the stage, of course. Then, my dear, it will be quite impossible for us to take her to Paris. It would be a great expense, and hamper us in every direction. Indeed, I cannot consent to it. We had better stay at home."

Kate had set her heart on Paris.

"If we couldn't take her —" she began, hesitatingly.

"Well, we can't. You had better let me make some engagement for her. There's Thomas, now, — he has an A 1. troupe. I've no doubt he would be glad to get her, before she has forgotten all her marvelous feats and careful training."

"But I wonder if she would be well taken care of? Dick used to look after her so. I was almost jealous myself, sometimes."

"Of course she will be well taken care of. It would be to any one's interest, you know. She is a valuable acquisition to the stage; remember what crowded houses she drew! Indeed, she ought to go back without any further loss of time. Suppose I see Thomas, and learn what he is willing to do."

"I must think it over first. And I ought to see what Titania would like."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the lover, sharply. "If you care so much more for her than you do for me —" and dropping the arm he held, he turned away.

"Oh, Gilbert! Dear Gilbert, don't be vexed. I don't know but you *are* right; only it is sudden, and I had not thought, and poor Dick wanted me to be good to her. I do believe he meant to leave her something, too. And I love her —"

"Better than you love me!" with a sort of fierce, stage moodiness. "Well — choose between —"

"Oh, Gilbert, how could I give you up? You are cruel!"

"My darling!" Then he clasped her in his arms, and kissed her; murmuring extravagant protestations, and poor, foolish Kate, who thought this the height of delightful romance, consented, yet with a secret misgiving.

"Perhaps it would be just as well not to say anything to Titania until I've seen Thomas," Chippenham remarked, carelessly, the next morning.

"Very well;" and Kate, like all weak women, was glad to put off the evil day.

But Chippenham was quite sure of his man before he broached the subject to Kate. And now he proceeded to draw up a year's engagement, though Thomas would fain have had it three. There was much haggling about the price, but when Chippenham had any advantage on his side he was sharp enough to use it.

So the wedding-day was appointed, the passage engaged, and Kate was engrossed with her bride-clothes. She lavished her money foolishly on the merest trifles, but she enjoyed it with the zest of sixteen. Thomas came, and she signed the agreement, though her hand trembled with a strange, shadowy fear of Dick. And the little bit of conscience she had left protested against this delicate, sensitive creature being made an article of merchandise, while she lavished Dick's savings on a new lover.

"You must tell her;" said Kate, weakly.

Gilbert Chippenham had no tender qualms on the subject. In a most business-like way he announced the impending change to Titania.

She took it quietly; astounded at the thought of separation from the only real friend she had in the world. And yet — if she could not go to Paris with Kate —

"You see he is a very foolish and exacting lover," ex-

plained Kate, afterward. "He wants me all to himself, a while, at least. If husbands would only stay as fond of one!" and she sighed. "But I shouldn't wonder if next year he sent for you. You see we are to travel a good deal, and it's a sight of bother and expense to take a third person. And you'll cheer up, my dear, for after all there is so much real pleasure in getting bouquets and things, and being encored. I wish I was on the stage myself."

Titania vouchsafed no reply. Somehow she felt wounded, deserted, and it made little difference to her, just then, what became of her.

Mr. and Mrs. Chippenham had a wedding-breakfast at a hotel, and Gilbert shone in supreme self-complacency. Titania was tastefully dressed in most fairy-like attire. Kate cried over her with a fond, sentimental good-by.

Mr. Thomas was in waiting.

"You'll be very good to her!" sobbed the bride, while the bridegroom whispered — "Don't make such a dunce of yourself, Kate!" but he had almost said fool.

"Of course, of course!" was the quick response. "Where is Jane Hewlett? Oh, Jane, you'll take this young one home with you. Her trunk is packed, isn't it? The coach is waiting, I believe. Don't give yourself a moment's uneasiness, Mrs. Chippenham. There, say good-by, and be done with it. Partings are always sad things."

Kate pressed the child to her heart, in a tender, regretful embrace, then her husband drew her away. Some of the guests were going to the steamer with them. Titania wiped the tears from her eyes, and followed Jane Hewlett.

The first tidings that met Roger Lasselle, in his search, were, that Madame Barretti had married again, and gone abroad, taking the child with her, it was believed. Whether the child was Signor Barretti's own, or not, no one could say positively.

CHAPTER XIII.

HER SHARE OF THE SPOILS.

TITANIA and her belongings were conveyed to the third floor of a large tenement-house, where the apartments were arranged somewhat on the flat system. Miss Hewlett had a parlor with a dark bedroom opening out of it, and a small room at the side, which, as it contained water and a drain, she called the kitchen. The furniture was very shabby, and the place was full of dust and litter, with a close, unwholesome smell. The windows opened into a little court, and opposite was the rear of another row of houses, with clothes-lines stretched across.

"Take off your hat, my dear, and be comfortable, do. I don't live in quite such style as Madame Barretti did," and Jane gave a sort of scoffing grin. "What an unmitigated fool that woman was! To marry such a fellow as Chip, when she might have lived at her ease! I'd had the handling of my money myself, I tell you, and if I'd fooled it away, that would have been my own business. He's a humbug, though he sets up for a genius. Why, my dear, he was once dead in love with me! I wouldn't have wiped my old shoes on him. But I suppose he's made her believe he's the very green cheese the moon is made of."

"Will he take her money?" asked Titania, with a face of genuine distress.

"Take it? Yes, and spend every cent of it. He's been spending it for these last two months, I know. She's paid for her own wedding, ha! ha! breakfast, coaches, parson's fee, and all, I'll be bound. But the champagne was good.

Let Chip alone for cutting a swell! She wasn't your mother?"

"No. But she was very good to me," said the child, her eyes filling with tears.

"Was Barretti your father?"

"No;" and Queen Titania sighed softly.

"Are you quite sure? A wise child, etc. —" and Jane Hewlett gave a knowing leer.

"Yes, I am quite sure."

Titania colored, without understanding why.

"Folks dead, I s'pose?"

"Yes;" and Titania sighed again. Of what avail would it be to tell over her half-forgotten story! No one ever believed it.

"Well, relations are not of much account. I ran away from mine. My mother was an old blue Presbyterian, of the awful sort, and my father — well, he used to lick me about every night. So, when I was fourteen I was tired of that kind of fun, and ran off with a circus troupe. My! I've seen lots of fun since. How old are you?"

"Ten," said Titania.

"Do you like the stage?"

"I don't know," — doubtfully.

"Do you act or sing any?"

"I never have;" was the quiet reply.

"Just trapeze and rope-dancing. I saw you one time while Barretti was alive. Well, you'll make a fortune out of that, if you have good luck; but more of 'em get lamed or maimed for life. It's dangerous business. You might do in ballets though. Come, don't you want a cup of tea? I'm going to boil a little water, and wet down some."

Titania glanced out of the window, while Jane lighted a kerosene stove and filled the small kettle. Then she placed some cups and saucers on the table.

"Shall you like to go to Montreal?"

"Where?" was the sudden, astonished query.

"To Montreal! We're to take a tour through the Canadas, you know, starring it. There's Dolly St. John, who sings, and dances break-downs; and Valentine, who does clog-dancing to perfection. And Thomas promised that I should be leading lady; but he's taking that Julie Pearl along, with her yellow hair and handsome feet, drat the girl! Let him set her over me if he dares! I think I make up as good for the stage as she. Come, here's your tea."

"I do not want it, please," said the soft voice, imploringly, as if asking a favor.

"You better have some. There's nothing like tea to settle your nerves, and comfort you when your best friends desert you. Did Barretti leave you any money?"

"No. That is — I am quite sure he did not."

"Well, it's a shame that Chip should have the spending of it, now I do say. But you can make money of your own. I wish you'd appoint me guardeen; come now, do."

"Guard— what?" asked Titania.

"Guardeen! ha, ha! Some one to take your money and spend it. I'd buy you lots of nice things. Oh, say, have you any jewelry? Was the Madame stingy? She had diamonds, didn't she? Have you any?"

"No," Titania replied gravely.

"Honor bright?"

"I should not tell a lie, if I had them."

"And I'd like to borrow them! ha, ha! Julie Pearl is a blaze of light in hers. Isn't that poetical, now? Well, if you won't have tea is there anything else you'll have?"

"Thank you, no."

Titania studied her hostess wonderingly. Miss Hewlett was twenty, though she looked older than that by daylight. Tall and slender, with great elasticity, and grace of figure, and a peculiar face, whose chief charm was large, languishing, blue eyes. She did a deal of stage execution with them. A careless, improvident Bohemian, with a good deal

of spirit and fire in acting, a quick and retentive memory, and keen sense of fun. She had succeeded fairly on the burlesque stage.

"Now, I'm going out," she began presently; "I have some calls to make, and you won't mind staying alone awhile, for I can't take you. There are some illustrated papers. I wouldn't unpack my things, for we're going to start soon, unless you're afraid of their crushing. And if you get hungry you'll find something here in the cupboard."

Whereupon Miss Hewlett re-arrayed herself, put on a fresh coat of beautifying powder, tied a dotted veil over her face, and was startingly brilliant.

As she stepped out in the hall she turned the key softly in the door, took it out, and put it in her pocket.

Left to herself, Titania had a quiet cry by the window. The day was warm, and there was very little air in this confined space between the two houses, or rather rows of houses, that reared their tall heads. Somehow it made her think of Mother Mell, and that half-forgotten episode, though it was a little cleaner and better. How dreamy all her life appeared until Dick Bridger entered it. Then everything stood out with startling distinctness.

"Oh, dear Dick," she cried, "come back to me! How can I live without you!

But there was no answer except the hum of crying, scolding voices, that seemed to fill the air with unrest. The sense of solitude frightened her. What would happen next? How could she ever perform without Dick? And where was Canada?

How long and dreary the afternoon seemed. She began to wish Miss Hewlett would return; but twilight fell, and then a deeper darkness. She huddled in the corner of the rusty sofa, frightened, lonely, crying by turns; and there Jane Hewlett found her at eleven, fast asleep; but she was

too weary with her own good time to do more than tumble into bed by herself.

The next day Mr. Thomas paid her a visit. Titania shrank from him. A small man, with sharp, keen eyes, close-cropped chestnut hair, and a light yellowish-red beard.

"I'll take her to the old woman, I guess," said he. "She's out of practice, no doubt, and will need a little training. Gad! she ought to make any one's fortune. You've not performed since Barretti's death?"

"No," was her timid answer.

"Then you'll have to take a course. And there's such a little time, too. We start sharp next Tuesday. You'll not forget, Hewlett?"

"Not I! My summer tour;" and the girl gave her short, unmeaning laugh.

"That's her trunk, eh? Well, you've a pretty good start in life, though you'll never get anything else out of the Madame. Chip'll make ducks and drakes of the money before you can say Jack Robison. Get on your things, miss, and come along."

Titania felt that she hated this man. If she only dared refuse, and defy him! But she was too small and too powerless to do anything but obey; and her rigid training made that easier now.

"Why didn't you take her home with you yesterday?" asked Jane, in surprise.

"Because I had something else on hand, and the old women took a holiday. Any more questions?"

"I'll save the rest," was the rejoinder.

Titania followed her guide. A short walk, and a car ride, brought them to their destination, a somewhat dilapidated-looking house, not far from the East River. Mrs. Thomas, a faded and untidy looking woman, received them. There was a parlor, and the adjoining room contained a bed, as well as an inmate, who came peering through the

folding-doors, and uttered a growl, — a sort of misshapen thing, that made Titania shiver.

"My, what a picter!" exclaimed Mrs. Thomas. "And all that mop of hair her own, too? But I should be afraid 'twould catch, or somethin', as she was jiggerin' round. An' that's the Queen Titania they made such a row over last year? I hope you'll make lots of money out of her, Owen. Ranny, come see the pretty little girl."

"I'll kill the pretty little girl!" shouted the amiable Ranny, whose proper name was Randall.

"You let her alone, if you know when you're well off," said his father.

"Hush, Ranny!" counselled his mother.

"I won't hush, there!"

"You young villain, I'll strangle you," — and his father started for the door.

"Oh, don't, Owen, Owen, remember! He's trying, I know; but remember!" and she stood in her husband's way.

"Hang the brat! If you don't teach him to keep a civil tongue in his head I will."

Ranny betook himself off, sliding and thumping over the floor.

"Don't be frightened," said Mrs. Thomas, reassuringly. "Ranny won't hurt you. But he's a great sufferer, a great sufferer."

Mrs. Thomas had a way of repeating the last clause of a sentence twice, and occasionally thrice, as if to give it more power.

Titania's eyes dilated, and she shrank to the corner of the sofa.

"I want to take her down town this afternoon for a practice," announced Mr. Thomas. "Don't let Randall frighten her. I must go out now, and see about getting ready. We start Tuesday morning. Her trunk will come presently. Have you any costumes?"

"I don't know," was the hesitating answer. This life seemed strangely new to her.

"Just look them over, Mary, and see. I hope there isn't much to be bought, for funds are running low. If I shouldn't make a success of this tour I shall be dead broke. And they all want a fortune before they'll stir. Chip made me pay a month's advance for her," nodding to Titania. "I'd kept her at Jane Hewlett's, but there would have been board to pay."

Then Thomas gave a glance in the next room.

"Don't let me hear any bad account of you, or I'll break every bone in your body," said he to the inmate.

With that he disappeared. Mrs. Thomas took Titania's hat, and hung it over the chimney of a bracket lamp. Then she asked her if she was fond of the stage, and if Madame Barretti was really her mother, and why she did not go abroad with them.

"I must go down-stairs, and see to my dinner," she announced presently. "Will you stay here and look out of the window, or would you rather go with me?"

"I will go with you," returned Titania.

"Ranny, I'm going down stairs," said his mother.

The child gave a sort of summersault, and bounced out into the room. Titania uttered a scream, and buried her face in Mrs. Thomas' arms.

"He won't hurt you, will he, Ranny? There, come down-stairs, and you shall have some cake. Be a good boy, Ranny."

The child was now about twelve, but it would have been quite impossible to guess at his age. His face was old, wrinkled, and drawn; his head was set in his shoulders, without any neck, his body was large, his legs very short, but his arms were long, and his fingers like a skeleton's. An accident in early childhood, resulting from his father's drunken carelessness, with the addition of epilepsy, had made him what he was. His face was filled with an ugly,

wolfish light, and his almost black hair, cropped close, added to the general diablerie.

"I think I will stay here," said Titania, with a gasp, her eyes dilating.

"I'll stay here too," said Ranny.

"You had better come with me;" and Mrs. Thomas placed her hand over Titania's shoulder. But this roused all the jealous fury of the child, who made one dive at Titania's ankles, but caught his mother's foot instead, outstretched like a flash.

"Randall, you *must* behave. I shall surely let your father whip you if you touch this little girl. I didn't want him to bring you here," she said, fretfully. "Randall seems to hate all children, and I have my hands full, I'm sure. I wish we were both dead. There, run on, and let me manage him." Then she stooped, and whispered in her ear, "Go in the back room and hide, and I'll take him down-stairs, but make believe you are going." Then aloud: "You'll see the stairs at the back part of the hall; go right on to the front basement."

Titania took a few steps, then darted into the adjoining room, while Randall lumbered along after his mother. When he found out that his prey had eluded him, he gave a terrific howl, but Mrs. Thomas had locked the door, and now used her best endeavors to pacify him with luxuries, of which he was ravenously fond.

Titania crept back to the window, and curled herself up on the sofa, afraid to let even her feet touch the floor. There she sat and shivered, too much frightened even to cry. Oh, why had not Kate taken her! or why was she not dead with Dick!

When the dinner was ready Mrs. Thomas came for her. Randall was at the end of the table, in a high arm-chair; and though he glared vengefully at her, he was too much occupied with eating to pay much attention to her. As for Titania, the first morsel seemed to choke her.

"Do eat," began Mrs. Thomas, persuasively, piling some luxuries on her plate. "Why, you'll starve, and not be fit for anything."

"You gim me that!" shouted Randall, as his mother helped Nora to a choice bit. "If you don't I'll send this fork straight at her," and he poised it with a very direct aim.

"Oh, let him have it. I don't want anything, indeed I don't;" and the child sprang up in, deadly terror. "Let me go up-stairs again."

"You shan't go! I want you here! I hate you, and I'll send this smack in your face!" he screamed.

Titania opened the door, and the whizzing mug, of plated silver, struck against it, thereby saving her. But she fled in dismay.

"I'll bring you up some dinner, presently," said Mrs. Thomas. "He always goes to sleep in the afternoon. Don't be frightened. I wouldn't let him hurt you, though I don't see what Owen brought you here for, when he knows, — Poor Ranny, he isn't to blame. It's a judgment on Owen, but he never can see it. An' he was such a sweet, pretty baby. There, dear, don't cry."

She went back to the screaming Randall, while the affrighted Titania shrank into her sofa corner, trembling like an aspen. Presently it became still down-stairs, and Mrs. Thomas made her appearance with a tray, on which there were some delicacies. Titania glanced furtively at the door.

"He's asleep, now, my dear," was the reassuring comment. "If it wasn't for his afternoon nap, I'm sure I wouldn't know what to do. It gives me a chance to finish my work, and then I fix up and take him out in his wagon, and do my errands. But he isn't always so troublesome," with a sigh of relief. "There, dear, do eat a bit. You'll get used to him presently, only it's best to keep out of his way while you're strange, poor lamb! You see he isn't

exactly right, and when he sees other children it makes him angry like, because he can't run around and play."

"Was he hurt?" asked Titania, sympathetically.

"Yes, dear," and the mother sighed again. "It's a long story, all of it. You see — you'll find this out for yourself before long — Owen drinks now and then. If it wasn't for that I'd be a happier woman, though I do say Owen has never struck me, and he's provided well at the worst of times. But when Ranny was about three he wasn't very well, and kinder fretty, as children often are. Owen came home late one night, an' had been drinking, an' wanted to tumble into bed with all his clothes on, an' I wouldn't let him. Mebbe t'would have been better;" and Mrs Thomas wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron. "The baby woke an' cried, an' he struck it. I interfered. I couldn't lay there an' see my own flesh an' blood abused for nothing. An' then we had a reg'lar quarrel, and he made a spring at the baby, and threw it across the room. It cried and sobbed till it was all beat out, and had a great bump on its forehead. The next day it had an awful fit, and was droopy for ever so long afterwards, when its back took to growing out, and Owen he knows he hurt it that night. And though it's a poor 'flicted thing, an' ugly to look at, it's dear to me. Owen's pretty good to him most of the time. Then he's away a great deal, an' I get along. But, goodness! You ain't eat a bit!"

"I can't," cried Titania, sick at heart. She was thinking of the horrible fate of having this man for her master.

"Don't say a word to Owen. He wouldn't like me to tell. But it isn't the poor lamb's fault that he ain't like other children. Let me give you just a mouthful of wine, it will help you up a bit."

At this juncture Mr. Thomas entered in high, good spirits, having only partaken of the glass that cheers, and raised some money also. The man had an ambition to attain to the position of a theatrical manager and lessee.

He had made two fortunate hits in his life, and lost the good results of both through the demon of intemperance. During the past winter he had been quite prosperous again, and had resolved now upon starring it with a Variety Troupe, having made some promising arrangements, and secured attractive, if not first-class talent. He hoped to make a star of Queen Titania, and had overbid the manager of another troupe for her.

He was pleased to find the house quiet, and his wife thus careful of his protegee's welfare. Then he bade her put on her hat, and come with him, as she was to have a practice at one of the theatres.

Titania shrank from the task with painful intensity. When they reached the place, she found there had been a rehearsal of a play, and a few loungers were still hanging about. The dim lights gave the stage a weird, dingy appearance, and the vast auditorium was as sepulchral as the catacombs. Various articles were scattered about. The walls of canvas, and iron, and timber, with their attendant machinery, made grim goblins and fantastic scenes, while bits of glitter, here and there, looked drearily commonplace and tawdry. Coming from the warmth and sunshine it appalled the unaccustomed eye, and was almost like entering an inferno.

"Hillo! Here's Thomas!" cried a voice that was warm and human. "We were just going out, old fellow. We've had our festival of high art. Whose stray kid is that, with her clouds of gorgeous golden hair, if I may be bold enough to ask."

"There's little you'd stop at for lack of boldness," was the curt rejoinder. "Be off with the lot of you. This stage is mine for the next hour."

"How proud we are! How fond to show our clothes, and call them rich and new," recited the first speaker, in a funny, breathless tone, with no pauses or emphasis. "Poor

sheep and silk-worm! Thomas will have nothing to do with you until you are satin and broadcloth."

"Get out with your chaffing;" was the impatient answer.

A young woman darted forward at that moment, clasping Titania to her bosom, and kissing her rapturously.

"Oh, you angel!" she cried. "I was sure, after two good looks at you, though you have forgotten me, I dare say. It's Barretti's little Queen. You're going to take her to Canada, Thomas?"

"Well, it's my business, I s'pose!"

"Oh, you needn't be snappy! It's dangerous in dog-days. Lu, come and look at this child. She's the one I've been raving about. You never saw anything so handsome in your life. Kiss me, little darling."

"Then she wasn't Barretti's own child? What a fool that woman was to marry Chippenham!"

"I shall always think she was Barretti's child," said the first speaker, pointedly.

"Come, stop your everlasting gabbling, and clear out," said Thomas, gruffly. "Time is precious, and the child is all out of training. We are to start on Tuesday."

"Oh, do let us stay!" pleaded a chorus of voices.

"Not one of you. Come, I haven't interfered with you any, and I'm not going to devour the child. You'll see her again. She can't stand this rabble."

"Rabble, indeed!" with a scornful laugh. "You'll be glad of the rabble some night."

"Will you go!" and now an angry light shot up in the eyes of Owen Thomas. "The child shan't so much as take off her hat while you stay."

They saw he was in earnest, and, after a few impertinences, took their way out through the side-scenes. He followed to make sure they were really gone, and then arranged the stage for her well known rope-dancing.

"Oh, I cannot!" she cried with sudden vehemence. "I cannot do it ever again! I am afraid!"

"We'll see, I guess. I haven't hired you for nothing;" was the reply.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CLANK OF THE CHAIN.

TITANIA stood shivering and trembling. This man had no personal magnetism like Dick Bridger. He could only inspire her with repulsion and fear. She was weary and nervous. The parting with Kate, the long, lonely afternoon in a strange place, the change of that morning, her fright with the terrible Ranny, and the dread of her new master, seemed to deprive her alike of nerve and physical strength.

"You've not been on the stage since Barretti's death," he questioned, abruptly.

"No. And I can't, without Dick,—my dear Dick!" and Titania gave way to a violent fit of weeping.

"See here!"—and Thomas confronted her fiercely—"I've hired you and I'm going to pay a big price, too, more'n you're worth, may be. Chip's a blasted old screw, when he gets a chance, like all beggars! Just wait until the tables are turned—it won't do for him to ask favors of me;" and Thomas shook his fist at his imaginary adversary. "There, I don't expect much of you to-day, but you see there's precious little time. It'll all come back to you. Don't be afraid! Why, I've seen you make people hold their breath, at some of your feats. Come!"

Would he beat her if she refused?

"There isn't any music. I didn't think how inspiring it was; but I don't expect you to do much dancing. It's the posturing mostly that I want to get at. Balance yourself."

She attempted it without a word, and once there, the fear of accident gave her strength; but it was the daring

of one in ghastly peril. More than once she almost toppled over. The wonderful grace remained, but the brilliant courage quite failed her.

"You must do better than that!" Thomas said sharply. "I think the lights, and music, and applause have something to do with it. Now I want you to try a new feat."

He brought out a small platform, about six feet high, and placed it in the middle of the stage. On this he sat a sort of pedestal, nearly as high again. The top was flat, with a diameter two feet, or so.

"Run up this ladder," and he placed one against the base.

She obeyed, but paused on the platform.

"Go on—just steady yourself with your hands."

"Not up to the top!" she exclaimed, aghast.

"Yes, to the top. Don't stop to think about it. You've done more dangerous things."

"Oh, I can't!" and she shrank back in dismay.

"Get up, and no fooling, if you don't want your neck broke!" and the man uttered a fierce oath. Then, seeing her terrified eyes and ashen face, he gave a forced laugh.

"Come, my girl," and there was a more persuasive accent in his tone, "I don't mean to be rough, nor frighten you, but the thing has got to be done! And you won't mind it after a time or two. Here, let me steady you a bit. Now if you feel dizzy-like, or fancy yourself going, make a spring to my arms. I'll catch you, never fear."

She stepped to the top, and he handed her the balancing-pole.

"You must learn to do without that. There! It isn't so bad, after all. I have some stunning new feats in my mind. The public must have a variety, you see."

She drew a slow breath, as if a feather's weight might unsettle her. Perched way up there, with the dreary twilight-waste on every hand, and the dim, ghost-haunted

corners ready to send out some lurking phantom, she could hardly resist a scream of terror.

"Now I'll lower a ring for you to catch. Drop your pole and hold fast of that."

Titania clutched it like a drowning man.

"That will steady you, and give you courage. Now I want you to pose on one foot, — a little more, — there. Now try the other. Let me see; if I whistle I think you can dance. I'll have some music to-morrow. Now let's begin."

It was a rather spiritless performance, Titania felt. Thomas had the good sense to make no discouraging comment. The little face looked frightfully white.

"There, you may come down now. It wasn't so bad after all, but you'll have to do it a sight better than that. Gad! just think of an audience watching such a mite of a thing way up there, and not knowing whether she'll come down alive or not. It's like the harrowin' part of a novel, when the hero's in some awful fix. People like that kind of suspense."

He had her safely in his arms, but the heart beat fearfully against his shoulder.

"Sit down and rest. Here's a sup of wine for you; why, you ain't much in the way of daring, after all. I hope I shan't lose money on you, and I must make a lot if you pay. I've a chap engaged that will beat Barretti all to nothing."

Titania shuddered as she listened to the man's loud, important voice, whose tones were exaggerated by the space and ghostly quiet.

"There, you feel better now, don't you? The wine put a little color in your face. Now I want you to try it again."

She had hoped the cruel test was over, for this time. One glance she gave at the dizzy height, and then she almost shrieked,

"Oh, don't make me! I am tired, sick! I should throw myself off, and be killed! Only wait until to-morrow. I will try then, indeed I will. Let me go home, and go to bed!"

Her beseeching voice might have moved the mythical heart of a stone, and her strained, despairing face did touch the man.

"Well," he returned, ungraciously, "but it won't do for you to cut up many such shines. I'll let you off to-day, you're a bit strange, I know. Get your hat, and come. Women always are the devil for contrariness, it's born in 'em. But don't you try this trick over too often, or you'll see who is master!"

She followed him through the tortuous piles of stage trumpery, and they emerged to daylight. Thomas kept a sharp eye on her, but he need not have feared. She was too spiritless to escape.

The streets were full of children at play, with now and then a brawling mother rushing out to meet a little one, or a shrill voice calling from a window. Was everybody cruel to children? It seemed so in her small experience. But Dick *had* loved her.

Indeed, her life with Dick Bridger was clean and wholesome. Beyond the inseparable hardships of the training he had been indulgent. He had cared for her physical comforts with something beyond the mere reference to bodily well-being, — tenderness, — for the man was not hard or cruel from any delight in torture. When a point must be attained he took the shortest and most decisive way, even if it were sharp.

Though the months with Kate had been delightfully luxurious, still she had missed the strong, sustaining affection. But to be plunged into this dreary desert!

"If I might go to my own room?" she said, timidly, to Mrs. Thomas, as they entered the house.

"Why, child, wait up and have some supper, do.

Ranny's real good-natured now, and wants to see the pretty girl. I don't believe but what you could make quite friends with him. Come and see."

"Oh no! no!" Titania cried convulsively. "I am so tired! I do not want any supper. Please let me go to bed."

"Let the child do as she likes!" said Owen Thomas, gruffly.

"But it's so early." Then she caught sight of the tired little face. "Well," she continued, "maybe it will be best. There's nothing like a good rest, only it looks so queer to see a child willing to go to bed before dark. Come along, then. Your things are all up-stairs."

She followed her hostess to the third floor, an old-fashioned attic, with dormer windows, the house being shared with another family. The Thomases had but one room up here. It was clean, but close and warm, and the bed looked inviting.

"I expect you feel a bit strange, poor thing," and there was a motherly kindness in the voice. "Still, 'twould a been different if the woman that married — what was her name? — had been any real kin. Blood's thicker 'n water, I always say, and you can't feel for anybody quite as you can for your own. I often think if I was dead there'd be no one to care for Ranny, for fathers never seem to have the same feeling," — and the illogical woman paused. "Shan't I help you take off your clothes?"

"No," said Titania. "And if you wouldn't mind going down-stairs."

"O dear, no. But you're a queer little thing. Suppose I bring you up some tea?"

"No! I don't want anything."

"You're dead tired, that's it. I hope you'll rest comfortably. Good-by till morning."

After she had gone a few steps she came back.

"Maybe you'll feel safer to lock your door on the inside," she added, and changed the key.

Titania locked it immediately. Then she threw herself on the bed, and gave way to a flood of bitter, passionate tears. So young, and so miserable! Cast out of home and love — a thing for public amusement merely. How hideous it was! There were dim and undefined strivings of womanhood within, chaotic fancies, and remembrances that eluded her on every hand. Was life always to be thus?

She hardly realized until now what a blow Kate's marriage had been to her, and she hated Mr. Chippenham with an unreasoning, impotent, but enduring hate. What would he do after he had taken all Kate's money? Oh, if Kate could come back and care for her while she went on the stage, and if she could earn money enough for them both. And what right had Mr. Chippenham to sell her to this man; for to her childish understanding she appeared as truly sold as the pretty dogs that changed owners now and then. First it had been Mother Mell who wanted to get rid of her, and then that vile, wolfish-looking man in the hideous den — and Dick — dear Dick — oh, why did God take him away! She did not hold against him the blows and severity, she remembered only the love, the care, the tenderness, and cried as if her heart were breaking, — until she fell asleep, still in her dress, overcome by sheer exhaustion.

She felt rested the next morning, and the elasticity of childhood triumphed over its transient despair. Mrs. Thomas was kind, and Ranny not quite so terrible. The practice, too, was under more auspicious circumstances, and she pleased her new master better.

But it was a trying change from her recent life of luxury and leisure. Perhaps it was well that the blow had come so suddenly, for to have brooded over it would have invested it with terrors too bitter to be borne.

Escape might have presented itself as feasible if she had known more of the world, or less. But her past experiences had not been of the reassuring kind, and there was no one to whom she could turn. You cannot well conceive of a more friendless little being than this enchanting Queen Titania, who, if she had only known the magical word lying in her possession, like a rare gem picked from the highway, upon which no sign or seal of value has yet been set, would open the door of friendship and give her the delights of home, perchance lead to the restoration of that past, dim now even in dreams.

Oh, how the cruel old world mocks us, after all !

Yet Titania found friends, such as they were, among the party destined to be her companions for some time to come. Her sadness was beguiled by the excitement, and though her strength was severely taxed by the rehearsals, still she delighted to watch the others, and her childish heart was gladdened by the kisses and compliments showered upon her. Jane Hewlett she met again, and made Dolly St. John's acquaintance, who was one of the eager, rapturous, fun-loving sort. Mademoiselle Julie Pearl condescended to meet with them a time or two. A vain, supercilious beauty, who some way had gained a hold on the public, and of whom wonderful things were predicted.

"She'll spoil the whole thing, you see if she don't ;" said Jane Hewlett, in an aside. "Thomas made a big mistake when he engaged her ; but I'm not going to take any of her airs or impudence, I'll let him know that ! I can get an engagement almost anywhere, and I'll keep money enough by me to come home if I don't like starrng in the provinces."

Indeed, it was a pity that Mr. Thomas had not used more judgment in the selection of his materials, but 'the Pearl,' as she was termed, possessed a flavor of newness that had been most captivating through the winter.

Titania, meanwhile, became quite attached to Mrs. Thomas. Ranny's moods were peculiarly variable and vicious, but Titania managed to get through, with no more serious incident than having a handful of hair torn out by the roots. Several times, indeed, he was quite amiable, but she stood in deadly fear of his treachery, and was glad to say adieu.

"I wonder how I shall get my letter?" she asked wistfully of Mr. Thomas. "Mrs. Chippenham promised to write —"

"Oh, that will come in due time, never you fear. They won't lose track of you so easy;" and Mr. Thomas gave a sharply confident nod.

The party took the night boat to Albany. Titania was delegated chiefly to Jane Hewlett's care, but Jane was too intent upon sundry flirtations to take much interest in another person. But Dolly St. John and Titania drifted into an odd friendship. The one, who had been robbed of childhood, pure and simple, and made an anomaly in human nature, the other, to whom life would be forever childhood and a jest, who, when fun and dancing were over would go through the only tragedy possible for her — a dose of prussic acid.

She was but twenty, yet she had spent twelve years upon the stage, and remembered nothing before that, save nodding in the green-room while she waited for her mother.

The trip was far from dull. Titania had not outgrown her love for simple scenery. She sat and dreamed often, while the others laughed and jested, and there floated through her mind a dim vision of sweetness and beauty, but always ending with a chill sombreness, the remembrance of her mother's death.

They reached at last the quaint Canadian town, the scene of their first engagement, and were crowded into a rather dingy second-class hotel. The care that Dick

Bridger was wont to bestow upon his little Queen was a thing of the past. The others might treat her to fruit and bon-bons, or sips of wine, but the regularity, the wholesome diet, the soothing calm after a nervous strain, was not to be her strength and refreshment for the morrow.

It was late when they came in, and past midnight when they went to bed. The strange surroundings kept Titania awake for a long while, and the stir early in the morning shortened her sleep. Then there was a hurried rehearsal in the morning, lasting until two, the flurry and bewilderment of a strange stage, with its stuffy little green-room, its narrow exit and entrances, and the commonplace dreariness of dim daylight.

Titania went through her part with fear and trembling, but succeeded in pleasing. There was a lunch, with a plentiful flow of ale, the women eating with their fingers, and spicing the repast with slang and mild profanity, since they were good natured.

"You'll see that Titania's costume is all right," said Thomas to Jane Hewlett.

"Oh, let me!" screamed Dolly, with her mouth full of mutton pie. "I'm a stunner at such things. I'll make her gorgeous."

"I don't care who does it. Her limbs are to be as free as possible, you know. Nothing to interfere with her poses."

"Let me alone for that;" and Dolly winked cunningly out of one eye. "I don't believe in — what is it — gilding gold, or painting the lily, unless it's a poor faded lily. And Titania's an angel, a sylph, a fairy!"

"Dolly St. John, you are a fool!" interposed the Pearl, sharply.

"This is one of the cases where ignorance is bliss," was the retort.

Mademoiselle Pearl stared haughtily, not quite comprehending who had the best, or who was considered worsted.

Dolly was in her element that afternoon, arranging costumes. Signor Visconti, the trapezist, did not come to hand until evening, when the party were again assembled in the green-room. He was a slight, wiry, brigandish looking fellow, a stranger to the rest. The satisfaction of Mr. Thomas was at its height. Nothing had gone wrong.

At an early hour the Alhambra began to fill. Such wonderful attractions as the bills had announced were not to be slighted. The manager peered out now and then as the orchestra began tuning, and rushed back rubbing his hands in high good humor.

"A splendid house! A splendid house! Now you must all do your best. We'll take these Canadians by storm, and show them how we do things in the States. Where's that call-boy? Here, you villain, stop your fooling. The overture has commenced. Ready now."

Titania sat wrapped in a waterproof, in the lowest box, to see the first play; an especial favor gained for her by the good-natured Dolly. It was a sparkling little thing, with a jealous husband who somehow, in the end, got caught in the trap he laid for his angelic wife.

Dolly was the maid, who with *her* lover kept the audience in a roar of laughter, and was applauded in her song. Julie Pearl, as the ^awife, was gorgeously costumed, and sentimental. Jane Hewlett, the mutual friend, did her part well.

Then Valentini and his clog-dancing brought down the house, and Dolly St. John set everybody wild with her character songs. Then the curtain fell, and the audience hunted down their programmes. "The wonderful fairy queen, Titania, in her astonishing pedestal dance."

What was it? There was a stir of expectation.

Slowly the curtain wound its creaking way. The platform was visible — the pedestal, and there, perched way atop, a human mite, a fair, slender thing, with a cloud of golden hair, and scanty rose-hued drapery. Was it a

mortal being? Indeed, she looked more like a graceful statuette, poised by a sculptor's hand. The large, slow, moving eyes, with their dusky light, the small mouth with its dainty curves, the transparent skin. Dolly St. John had insisted upon rouging her cheeks, and they bloomed like a pale-tinted rose-bud. Her limbs, indeed her whole lithe, petite figure was so exquisitely lovely that the audience stared in silence, and wondered whether they had not been cheated by some marvellous figure, held in place by stage machinery.

CHAPTER XV.

A BOND SLAVE.

THE horns blew out a beguiling melody, and the violins came in with their inspiring strains. Slowly Titania moved, and the audience drew a breath of satisfaction. Thomas was watching her with a strange impatience.

"If she would only show a little spirit," he muttered.

Spirit! What, indeed, were steadiness of head, and care of foot, when a misstep, a wavering of balance, might dash her to the floor, maimed and bleeding. She tried to concentrate her mind on the music, to think of nothing beyond the performance, but they were long moments of deadly agony. It might have been a whole day or half a life time. The sea of faces were in a whirl before her when the welcome rope was lowered to steady her as the motion ceased.

Down came the curtain. Titania clutched her strongly, and for an instant all was darkness before her.

There was a round of thunderous applause, prolonged, then bursting out afresh. Then a bold call that found a dozen echoes.

"Titania! Titania!"

She came down from the platform quite exhausted. Dolly St. John caught her in her arms.

Still the applause continued, and the cries became more urgent.

"You'll have to go before the curtain and acknowledge it," said Thomas.

"Oh, don't send me!" the child cried in terror.

"Come, no airs."

"It's nothing," interrupted Dolly. "Just go and

courtesy, and then run back to my arms, you darling. If I were a rich woman I should adopt you. There, sweet, Thomas will be raving."

She dragged her strained and weary limbs, for the tense mental drain had been fearful.

A shower of bouquets fell at her feet, and the applause was renewed.

Signor Visconti was next in order. He had declined performing with the child, somewhat to Thomas's chagrin, at first, but the manager was rather glad, now, since Titania had made such a hit. Visconti was, after all, no marvellous athlete, and elicited such very moderate commendation that it roused his anger. And worst of all, the cries and calls began again :

"Titania! Titania!"

"She must go on again," said Thomas.

But Titania lay on a heap of stage drapery, trembling and weeping, her nerves completely unstrung.

"Come!" he cried roughly, "what foolishness is this?"

"She can't do it, Thomas," interposed Dolly. "You'd be a fool to kill the hen that lays a golden egg. The audience will be all the more crazy to see her to-morrow night. Make some explanation."

"Hold your clack!" exclaimed Thomas, furious at being thus dictated to, though common sense told him Dolly was right.

"Look at her! Put her up on that pedestal if you dare;" and Dolly's eyes blazed.

Thomas went on the stage and bowed. The noise subsided somewhat.

"Ladies and gentlemen, while I am honored by these proofs of your satisfaction and enjoyment, I regret to state that it will be quite impossible for Queen Titania to appear again to-night. The pedestal dance is very exhausting, and it would not be wisdom for a tired child to attempt it."

With that he bowed and retired. There was a little

murmur of dissatisfaction, but Dolly St. John sang a song, and the broad, amusing farce that followed restored every one to good humor."

"A week of such houses will be a grand beginning;" and Thomas rubbed his hands briskly.

But a mutiny had already commenced. Julie Pearl was jealous of Dolly St. John, and Visconti glowered at the little Queen.

The week was a success, though at its close Visconti quarrelled with the manager and left the troupe. To Titania it had been very hard, for the irregular living told on the child's strength. No careful Dick to note racing pulses and heavy eyes. Dolly was very good to her, but she was a wild, flighty little thing. Jane Hewlett and Julia Pearl quarrelled incessantly.

In the new engagement, Titania was to appear twice, later in the evening, in some remarkable feats. It was frequently past midnight before she was in bed. She learned to enjoy the jolly little suppers, at which Dolly was always the presiding genius.

And so passed a month. Dolly had an engagement in New York, Jane Hewlett quarrelled with the manager and Pearl, and went her way. Thomas was elated with his successes, and formed a new troupe to go westward.

But here his olden ill luck attended him. Prosperity turned his head, and led him into frequent carousals. By mid-winter he found himself at the foot of the ladder again, kicked there by the very men who had drank his champagne, and been feasted at his expense. He grew embittered and savagely morose. Others could keep out of his way, or refuse to make engagements with him, but Titania was his bond slave.

She had heard twice from Kate. They were living in Paris, at a hotel, kept an elegant turn-out, drove everywhere, went to theatres, and to balls and suppers, and dear Gilbert was the most adorable of husbands. He had taken

part of the management of a theatre, was writing a play for it, and this news overjoyed the little creature.

"If Gilbert succeeds," wrote Kate, "and I know he will, my dear, — Paris is so different from New York, and is not so jealous about recognizing talent, — he may have a theatre of his own, and we shall send for you. I hope you are well and happy, and improving. *We* expect to make a great actress of you. Are you as pretty as ever? I hope you keep your hair in nice order. Do not allow any one to cut it. I wish I had you here this very minute, though Gilbert declares that he should be jealous to see me kiss another human being. He confesses that he was desperately jealous of you. I should send for you immediately, for I am real lonely while Gilbert is at his club and the rehearsals, and he has so many people to see on business; but he says it wouldn't be fair to break the engagement with Thomas. Do you like him? Tell me everything, my sweet girl. Take care of your complexion and your hair. There is nothing like beauty for an actress. I hope you will grow tall and slender. Next year you will be with us. How I am counting on it."

Titania cried over her two precious letters, and slept with them under her pillow. She managed to concoct a wretched scrawl, with a strange sense of shame and embarrassment at her own ignorance. But she poured out all her child's heart, all her longings. Now Kate appeared to her as almost perfection. No woman, except Dolly St. John, had been so kind, save in the transient intervals of kissing and caressing for some remarkable performance. And there was such a continual change to her life. A week here, a fortnight there, the friends of yesterday disappearing in the night.

At the holidays Thomas indulged in a long debauch, the like of which had not occurred for several years. The engagements with Titania he found very profitable, albeit they were not of the highest order. Indeed, the poor

child was dragged to a depth that would have angered Dick Bridger, could he have seen his little queen, the darling of his heart.

Titania shrank from these associations. They disgusted her, nay, filled her with a horrible fear. She possessed an innate refinement, a love of clean and wholesome things, and though there was much in the ribaldry and profanity that was quite beyond her comprehension, she had an instinctive dread of it. The third-rate lodging-houses at which they generally stopped were filled with people from whom she shrank shiveringly, and hid herself in some little box of a room, sometimes pinched with cold, as wrapped in an old shawl she would curl herself up on the bed and indulge in a few solitary tears.

Kate's letter had given her so much comfort. Titania had been trained to such strict obedience that she seldom thought of rebelling. She counted the weary weeks, — the year *would* end presently.

In March they went to New York for a brief stay. Mrs. Thomas was looking worn, and Ranny's disease had taken on a new phase, but little short of insanity. In some of his rages Thomas threatened to kill the child; but, though the man had grown brutal enough through the influence of rum to do such a deed, still he had a wholesome dread of the law.

It seemed to Titania that she could endure the life no longer. The many privations had begun to leave their sign-manual. She was thin and pale, the brightness had gone out of her face, and a languor characterized every movement when she was off the stage. As for her performances, she went through them mechanically. She had grown used to danger and daring. Sometimes the music and the applause stirred her up for a brief while, but the inspiration was soon over. With a peculiar jealousy, Thomas had taken advantage of her dread of strange faces, to keep her as much to herself as possible.

In this mood, compounded of fear and despair, she wrote to Kate, making an appeal to her love, and describing her terrible life with Thomas. Could she not come to Paris at once? Would not Kate send for her? She would do her best for Mr. Chippenham. She had learned so many new feats; she had danced in the ballet also, and won much applause. But, Oh, how could she wait four or five months longer! She should die here if Kate left her alone all that time.

Then Titania crept cautiously down-stairs.

"Mrs. Thomas, will you give me a little money for a postage stamp?" she asked in a beseeching tone.

"Why, I have some here that you're quite welcome to. Hush, don't let Ranny hear your voice. It will set him off again."

"But I can't use that stamp, Mrs. Thomas. My letter is to go to Paris."

"How much do you want?"

"I don't know," hesitatingly. "I never put a letter in the Post-office."

"And I don't believe you can get a stamp like that any where around here. I wouldn't dare trust you to go down town. Thomas, he'd be so mad if anything happened to you. And you don't know your way much about the city."

It was very true. Titania shivered now, with the dim remembrance of her once being lost. She could never dismiss that sickening episode.

"Wait, and let Owen do it."

"But I would rather."

"Oh, there he comes now. Owen, Miss Titania has been writing a letter to France, and she wants a foreign postage stamp," said his wife. "She can't get it around here, can she?"

"No, she can't," and the man turned his bleary eyes full upon her. "You're a fool to be writing to them peo-

ple; what do you s'pose they care? You haven't had a letter in ever so long," he said, scoffingly.

"But I wanted to write;" and the pale little lip quivered.

"Why can't you take her letter down town, Owen?"

"Well, I will. You wouldn't know what to do, any how, 'n officials always hate to be bothered with children hangin' round, and asking questions. Give it to me."

"It is up-stairs."

"Well, go and get it — if you want it sent."

Titania went slowly, wondering. Thomas had sent two letters for her, and both had gone safely. Why should she distrust him now? But she was so very anxious about this, and she had a sense of concealment that was almost guilt. Yet there remained nothing to do but to produce it, which she did with an air of hesitancy.

"If you would only take me with you," she said wistfully.

"I can't. I have some business on hand, and you'd be in the way."

Titania delivered up the letter with a strange misgiving.

Thomas put it in his pocket and went about his business, which was to make a new engagement for the "world renowned Queen Titania." A travelling circus desired to obtain her for a few weeks.

He haggled over his bargain, and entirely forgot his other errand until Nora asked him at breakfast, the next morning, if the letter had gone. Something in her eager tones, and expectant face, struck him, and he dared not face her with a disappointment.

"Yes, that's all right," he returned, carelessly. "On Tuesday we start off on another tramp, so get your traps ready."

"You are quite sure it is gone?"

It was so important to her that she could not be satisfied with only one asseveration.

"Yes," he answered, crossly.

He did mean to post it that day, but various other matters demanded his attention, and it passed out of his mind until evening. Then he found himself at a drinking-saloon, with some roystering companions, playing cards. Inadvertently he pulled it out of his pocket, and uttered an oath as he saw it.

They finished their game, and one of the men disputed the points. Thomas broke the seal of the letter, and glanced vaguely over its contents.

I do not think the man did this from curiosity, or any distrust of Titania. It was a half-drunken whim. But he caught sight of his own name, read a few lines, and then thrust it into its former receptacle.

"The ungrateful little huzzy!" he muttered, settling himself to another game.

He staggered home at midnight, and the next morning, as he was dressing, remembered the half-read epistle. He would see what this puny thing dared to complain of. He had taken care of her according to agreement, paid for her promptly when the salary came due. Chippenham had left the matter in good hands for himself. It was the money or the child. A week's delay would cancel the engagement, and others stood ready to take Queen Titania.

Thomas had paid the money grudgingly, it must be confessed. He had found his winter's business with her more profitable, really, than first-class engagements. But that she should dare to complain! that she should have any ideas of her own!

"I'll pay her off for this, the miserable, deceitful jade!" he stormed. "She'll see whether her dear Kate will send for her!" and a cruel sneer crossed his lips. "I'll have her another year, if I choose! Chip'll likely be hard up, and glad to get the money. I'll make my own bargain, too! I've given in to her whims, and her wishes, and her cant's, and her wont's. She's got to come to the mark after

this, the sly little devil! I'll teach her to lie about me! Afraid! well, she better be! And I've a right to get drunk, if I like; it takes no one's money but my own! We'll see, my rare little lady! curse you!"

He hurried on his clothes, and ran down-stairs. The table was set for one, some dishes were covered in the oven, keeping hot, and a piece of juicy steak waiting to be broiled.

Ranny was fastened in a chair, before the window, the wide sill of which was strewn with playthings.

"Where's Titania?" thundered the master.

"Titania!" and Mrs. Thomas started, with a half-scared look. "Why, she is up-stairs, in her room. She had her breakfast an hour ago. What is the matter with you, Owen? You look —."

"Go up and see if she is there?"

"Why?"

"Go this minute, if you don't want your head broken," he shouted.

"Owen, are you crazy?" and she stood aghast. Then, frightened at the fierce scowl, she started to do his bidding.

He came to his senses before she returned. He would be crazy to give a hint about the letter, and he thrust it into the stove. No one must be aware that he had any special cause for mistrusting Titania.

"She's all right enough," said Mrs. Thomas, entering the room. "She's up-stairs, reading."

"I had a queer dream about her," was the explanation he vouchsafed.

"That she had run away?" asked his wife.

"Run away?" and he put on an air of surprise. "What made you think of that? Is she dissatisfied, or anything? No, I dreamed she was stolen, murdered," making up the story on the instant.

"How horrible, Owen! Who did it?"

"No one seemed to know. There, don't frighten her

with any such story. Hold your tongue about it. And, I say, keep a sharp lookout. Does she stay up stairs much?"

"Why, yes. It isn't hardly safe for her to be within Ranny's reach, you know."

"Hang the brat? If you let anything happen to her I'll shove him in a 'sylum the next day, just you mind that;" and he gave a sharp decisive nod.

"I don't think you need feel afraid. She's the shyest little thing I ever knew. She ain't a bit like the stage people I've seen. An' all she seems to care about now is poring over books and such. Ought n't she go to school some, Owen?"

"I don't know as that's any of your business. Them as own her hire her out for stage purposes, and make a fellow pay high enough for her, too! All I've to think about is getting my money back, and it's a hard squeeze!" finishing with an oath.

The savory fragrance of the steak mollified Thomas somewhat, though his unreasonable anger against Titania was in no degree abated.

She was in the power of a bad, brutal man; a man who daily deadened every faculty and feeling by the use of vile poisons. A little girl, particularly defenceless, in that there was no one to whom she could apply. Dolly St. John had been in the city during the winter, acting, but now she was gone to New Orleans. Beyond her, Titania's heart had warmed to no one. The shortness of their sojourn in every place had precluded anything like friendship. Then the narrow jealousy of Owen Thomas, and her own half diffidence, half fear of her kind, who had often been hard and cruel, kept her from responding to the advances that might have benefited her.

Thomas was rough and surly with her. It was really no new thing, or it might have set her to wondering. And then she hugged her blessed secret to her heart. Kate

would surely send for her when she read her letter. Or if, at the worst, more than half the year was gone. April was coming in. She would not have to be shut up in cold rooms, or stand shivering in scanty attire on draughty stages.

Ah, how good Dick had been! How he used to fold her in nice warm shawls, and carry her in his arms, and have bright grate fires in the room at night. And the quiet little suppers when she sat on his knee!

Ah, Dick Bridger, there was no more grateful memory in the whole world than that this child held of you.

But how had it fared with Kate, all this while?

She had realized that her new husband was not all perfection. It was an article in Gilbert Chippenham's creed that every woman, old or young, desired most of all to be made love to continually; and he fancied himself a complete adept in the art. So he managed to hold his sway over Kate, though he did now and then call her a fool. Meanwhile, out of her sight, he solaced himself with younger and fairer loves. He was in his element at Paris. He had picked up a very decent smattering of French, which was a great help to him now. He made a plunge into the gay, beguiling, theatric life of Paris; he was young, good-looking, and had plenty of money, and there were sharpeners enough — he could hardly have missed them anywhere — to relieve him of the little plethora.

And so he saw the gay world, Kate paying for it.

A keener woman might have grown suspicious, but he could deceive her so easily with his semblance of love, his good-natured jollity, — for he was not an ill-tempered man when it was all smooth sailing, and he had plenty of money. And she found much to amuse herself with; only, to her credit be it spoken, as the time went on she longed more and more for Titania.

It was the one point in dispute between the husband and wife. Chippenham had distrusted the quiet eyes of

Titania from the first. She seemed to read the subterfuges that blinded Kate so easily. If she were here she might help to open Kate's eyes, — and, truth to tell, he found her profitable where she was,—so he put off Kate's entreaties. Thus far Titania had made no complaints — she was well enough off then. They would send for her presently, when her year was up. Thomas might make no end of a row, and sue them, and they would get into difficulties without doing any one any good.

But Kate sometimes watched the groups of pretty children with a feeling of envy. Titania would be noticeable anywhere, and she hoped — not that the poor child was well treated and happy — but that she was growing more beautiful, that she would be tall and slender, and keep her hair of pale gold, and pearly complexion.

CHAPTER XVI.

"WE ARE SO TIRED, MY HEART AND I."

AH, the wearisome round! The vile smell of kerosene, the stale jests of the ring, at which happy unsurfeited boyhood laughs, when they are heard once or twice a year, the perils at which the audience first holds its breath, and then applauds noisily.

Never had the work been so hard to Titania. The strain and drain of the winter had worn her sadly, and the lassitude of spring seemed to take the strength out of her limbs, the ambition from her brain. The noisy voices distracted her, the rough tones of the men filled her with terror, and now and then some audacious kiss startled her, and made her shrink with an undefined fear.

There was a bold, handsome equestrienne, Mademoiselle Virginie de Rohan, who delighted the audience with her perilous riding, and took every opportunity to extinguish Queen Titania, and annihilate her with stinging sarcasms off the stage.

"This won't do!" declared Thomas, savagely. "You have no more spirit than a limp rag, and that slack rope performance was wretched! It hardly brought out a bit of applause."

"I was so tired," the soft voice said, piteously.

"Tired!" and he uttered an oath. "You are not worth your salt, you miserable limp rag!"

"Why do they want me then? And I had to go on the third time," she said, with a sudden touch of spirit.

"Take that for your impudence, will you!" and a blow

sent her reeling against an upright supporting a side scene. "I'll teach you who's master here."

She was stunned, for a moment; then all her outraged pride asserted itself.

"How dare you strike me!" and she stood before him pale as death, but firm and untrembling.

"You'll get it again if you don't shut your head. See here," and he seized her roughly by the arm, so that she was compelled to cry out with the pain. "See here, you've put on too many airs of late, and by God I'll stop it. I'm your master! I pay for you, and a devilish good price, too, and you've got to work for it. Let me see any such milk-and-water performance another night!"

She shrank away, cowering like some poor beaten dog. Of late he had grown so fierce, so brutal indeed! She could not know that the intercepted letter was rankling in his mind, urging him on at such times when rum made a demon of him.

So she crawled away to her lonely bed, faint, frightened, sick with the thought of the dreary days that must intervene before salvation came.

Titania tried her utmost the next evening, and pleased her audience, was loudly encored, and repeated one or two of the most trying feats. Thomas was better natured, and gave her a rough sort of commendation, but it was more to her than all the applause of the crowd. She was so tired of that, so tired. But she kept up heart. It was only a month's engagement with the circus, and after that there might be a little rest. Even the home with Mrs. Thomas looked inviting.

Alas! In this she was doomed to a bitter disappointment. Thomas had what he called a streak of luck. A boon companion had made him an offer in partnership of a place in successful operation.

L—— was a large manufacturing town. On every hand were evidences of trade and industry. There were mills,

factories, shops, unlimited water-power, railroads crossing it like a net work. On the outskirts, at the northern end, there was wealth, culture, refinement, and beauty. Elegant ladies rode in their carriages, fine looking, well kept business men thronged the streets. Churches, an extensive library, a handsome hall, with its concert and lecture rooms, and nicely kept parks, afforded sources of interest and amusement.

That was the bright side of the town.

But there were other places, given over to the low and vile; there were streets abounding in beer saloons, cellars, and gambling-dens. Now and then a spasm of virtuous public sentiment was aroused, and a descent made upon the most notorious, but in a few weeks it would be forgotten.

There was, at one point, amid shops and factories, a railroad junction. Long ago it had been given over to business, though a few old white haired men babbled of the time when it had been an orchard, and the ancient landmarks of houses were inhabited by the first families. Turning up a broad business thoroughfare you saw, on the one side, a few second or third rate boarding-houses, billiard-halls, and lunch-rooms. Standing next, in a little recess, was a broad, low building, with a flaring gilt sign, "The Odeon," and at each side bulletin-boards with posters in blue and red, and gorgeous ornamental capitals.

Common as the Odeon seemed, it was a great place of resort, and profitable to its owners or lessees. There were always some handsome dancing-girls, dashing character songs, witty burlesques, and a drinking-saloon next door. The audience was not choice or select, composed largely of roughs, and that portion of factory hands who ate and slept in boarding-houses, and spent their evenings where the attraction was the strongest.

Six months ago Thomas would have disdained this offer; now he closed with it instantly, as general stage-manager.

Titania found herself again in a strange city, amid smoke, and grime, and noise, an inmate of a common boarding-house, sharing a third-story front room with two coryphees of the burlesque.

Titania glanced around, in piteous terror, as she was set down in the midst. The shabby carpet was worn in holes, the bureau and chairs had been long despoiled of their pristine polish. A very much tumbled double bed in one corner, and a small camp bedstead in another, a closet door open, displaying much soiled finery, and the top of everything loaded down with bits and fragments, faded flowers, gauze, spangles, wigs and curls of jute, or other imitation; the disorder of the green-room for daily living.

A girl sat on the floor fashioning some sort of stage costume, as tumbled in her own attire as in her surroundings. She might have been twenty, and was handsome, with a bold, hard beauty, albeit very fair.

"I shall have to put this new girl in your room, Miss De Vere. I'm just crowded full, and there's a spare bed here," said the landlady, a stout, florid personage.

Miss De Vere glanced up and nodded. Titania stood just inside the door, feeling strangely desolate.

"Come in, and make yourself at home. Why, what a mite you are! You're not that wonderful Queen Titania, of course? Don't be afraid."

The voice was carelessly good-natured, and the face as carelessly indifferent.

"Yes, I am — Queen Titania;" was the low, tremulous answer. Ah, if she were not!

"Oh, my stars and garters! You!" and there was more contempt than surprise in the tone. "None of your lying! It won't go down here."

Titania's eyes filled with tears, — sweet, soft-brown eyes that her dead mother had loved.

The other looked astonished.

"You don't really mean it!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I am —" but her voice failed.

"Well, I declare! Here we've been afraid of our very lives, thinking you were some great thing, and that nobody would look at us when you came, and you're just the merest mite; and somehow you've an awfully old-fashioned look. Why! you're not a bit handsome, either."

Titania flushed. She had learned how necessary beauty was, and all of her hopes of Kate rested upon that fact. For an instant she was stunned and crushed by the blow.

"You're thin and pale, and altogether different from what I expected. Rose and me, that's my partner, — she's Rose, and I'm Lilian. We chose the names because I was fair, and she has a good deal of color; and oh, such black eyes! We pass for sisters, but we're not; a high old contrast we make," and she laughed loudly. "As I was saying, Rose and me had made up our minds that we'd give you a hard time of it, but you look such a weak, forlorn little thing! Why, how old are you?"

"I must be nearly eleven, I think;" and now the tears began to drop silently.

"Eleven! Oh, I don't believe that. You're not more'n nine, I know. Empty a chair, and sit down. Come, make yourself at home. I want to hear about that pedestal dance. Do you really dance, and is it up so high? Oh, there, don't be a baby! May be you'd like to take off your things, and lie down here on the bed."

She sprang up and swept off the finery, huddling it in a heap in the corner, and looking wonderingly at the child, who was now sobbing.

"There! I wouldn't cry. You feel a bit strange, but you'll soon get used to us; and I'll coax Rose not to stir up a row. Rose is mighty hot-headed, I tell you; and we thought you'd cut in for some of the chaps, but you're not that kind, I think; and you're too little and pale, anyhow. Fellows don't like such milk-and-water girls. You're out of our line, altogether; so Rose can be content."

Titania took off her hat and mantle, and laid them on a pile of trumpery, the foundation of which was a chair. She sat wearily on the side of the dingy bed. There was a whirl of confusion without. The screech of the different locomotives, the rattling of carts and wagons over the cobble-stones, the shouts, and calls, and cries, the noise and hubbub in the house, the click of billiard-playing somewhere, and a snatch of drinking song by a tipsy German, fell on her sensitive ear with painful incongruity. It was a close, warm morning, and the house had a sickening scent of uncleanness.

They had been travelling over country-ways, where the young and dewy spring was making itself felt and seen. Soft greenish-brown wraiths stood by the roadside, and violets starred the grass; while the wandering south wind wafted the spicy fragrance of the awakening woods. And now to come to crowded streets and stifling rooms, the squalor and glitter that jostled rudely the coarse, hard life! — oh, if she could but die! she was tired of waiting for Kate's summons. Could she ever live through the long, warm summer? Suddenly her heart and flesh failed. It seemed for a moment as if she might be dying, and a shiver of fear sped through her veins.

"Can I do anything for you?" cried Lillian, startled at the deathly paleness. "Are you sick? Oh, you *are* a poor little mite. Why, your'e never fit for the things you're said to do, or is it all a sham! Guy! Won't King be mad if Thomas has bamboozled him!" and she laughed coarsely at the thought.

"Is King —" and a choking sensation stopped Titania's voice.

"King is our grand high duke. Now its 'King and Thomas' unrivalled combination troupe, Queen Titania, the world-renowned child acrobat, trained by a celebrated performer' — who trained you?" changing her tone, abruptly.

"Signor Barretti."

"Barretti? I don't believe I've seen him. Where is he?" with a dull wonder in her eyes.

"Dead!" and then Titania said softly to herself, "Oh, my poor, dear Dick, can you not send for me to come to heaven? I am so miserable here."

"Oh! Have you any folks — relatives?"

"No." She was tired of going into particulars only to hear most of them discredited.

"Well, you don't look so much like dying as you did a minute ago. You'd better get rested up, as you're on the bills for to-night."

Lilian resumed her seat and her work. Titania lay quite still. There was a ringing in her ears, the thump of a sledge-hammer at her temples, and every inch of her small body throbbled with a dull, torturing pain. So tired! So tired! How could she get up and dance to-night; leap, and fly, and swing!

There was a great stir presently. A click of heels up the stairs and through the halls, a snatch of street song, and some one entered the room. Titania did not open her eyes.

It was Rose, and the clatter of the two girls' tongues almost set her wild. Rose had a mind to be unfriendly, but Lilian took her part, and pitied her, depreciating her with every word, it was true, and yet it did not seem to be done with either malice or ill-nature. Its perfect honesty was the bitter sting to the poor child.

She had been caressed and flattered a great deal during her short life. She had learned that beauty and grace and attractiveness were the cardinal points, and in her childish way she had been proud of possessing them. But to be rudely shorn of all her glory, to have a failure predicted, seemed so cruel! Could she dare to face this brazen, decisive Rose, this complacent Lilian?

There was a loud clang through the house, that startled her. She sprang up, white and terrified.

Lilian laughed heartily.

"That's only the dinner bell. Will you go down? Poor little thing. Rose, I feel sorry for her;" and the glance seemed to bespeak the other's pity.

Rose stared insolently.

"You look like the ghost of buried hopes! King's been sold, sure as my name's Rose De Vere."

Which it isn't at all," laughed Lilian.

"To all intents and purposes. If my sponsors neglected their business it follows that I must see to it. Will it please your high mightiness, Queen Titania, to descend to the lower region, and partake of pork and beans, or calf's brains?" and she held out her elbow, as if offering her an escort.

"I would rather stay here. I am not hungry."

"You had better come," suggested Lilian.

Titania shook her head.

"No fooling," and Rose gave her companion a jerk. "Dinner is always a game of grab, you know. The first fellow is the best fellow."

With that they left her. Titania shed a few bitter, lonely tears. Oh, if there were but one, — Kate, Dolly St. John, or any human being who had been kind to her, — one soul to care what became of her.

After dinner the two girls dressed themselves, and went out. Trailing black silk gowns, glaring jewelry, and imitation laces, powder and rouge for Lilian, and lily-white for Rose. Jauntiest of hats, and lace veils that enhanced their beauty, and rendered them more attractive for their promenade and street flirtations.

Titania fell asleep, presently, from sheer exhaustion. It did her good. The racking head-ache was better, and though she still trembled in every limb, a latent strength came to her aid. She rose, washed her face and hands,

though the filthy basin left by the two girls half sickened her, combed out her shining hair, and tied a ribbon in it. Not a moment too soon. The knock at the door announced Thomas.

"Why did n't you come down and have some dinner?" he asked, roughly, not being at all moved by her pale face.

"I felt sick," she answered, hesitatingly.

"You've no business to be sick, do you hear that? I don't hire you to get sick. Here's your trunk, and you better be looking up your traps. I expect you to make a hit to-night, d'you hear?" and he glanced at her savagely.

"Oh, Mr. Thomas," she cried, "couldn't I have some other room. There are two girls here, and if I could be alone—"

"A room to yourself! Well, you have big ideas, for a small person, I must say. Next thing you'll ask for a lady's maid, maybe a carriage of your own; ha, ha!" with a sneer. "You're better off here where there's some one to see that your toggery is about right. And I can't afford any such luxuries. Look out that you come down and get some supper," and he shook his fist.

She made no answer to her brutal master.

When he was gone she unlocked her trunk and took out a few articles. How soiled and crumpled they were. If she could only have something bright and fresh; if there could be some one like Dolly St. John! Ah! how long ago that seemed. How long since any one had really cared for her.

Well, by this time, Kate must have her letter. April was half gone, and, with the hopefulness of a child, she looked forward to relief. Kate surely would not leave her with Thomas the whole summer.

With a great effort she ate a little supper. Then she went to the theatre with the De Veres, heard the stale jests and insolences, and watched the preparations with quiet apathy. The audience began to gather, and to grow

impatient. There was the burlesque, the dancing, wildest of its kind, the songs, the rough applause, the calls for favorites — she had seen it so many times. How could they skip, and whirl, and laugh, as if it was all a delight to them. Did they never tire?

She looked so pale and exhausted when it came her turn, that a fellow who had been ranting in scarlet and tinsel, as a prince, insisted that she should take a mouthful of brandy. Thomas eyed her savagely.

"Don't you dare to fail! if you do I'll half murder you," and he pinched her arm until it stung.

She did not fail. It was agonizing to the last degree, for every muscle and nerve was in intense physical torment. The noisy crew applauded, stamped, and finally cheered. Queen Titania had been a success. The flying leap must be taken again. There were cries and calls, — in a place like this the mob rules.

There was a noise in her ears like the rushing of a whirlwind, and when she reached the stage so dense a darkness was before her eyes that she tottered, and sank on one knee, and for a moment or two remembered nothing.

Rose De Vere was in high dudgeon, as King went around rubbing his hands.

"She's a trump card, Thomas! The house will be packed to-morrow night. Seems to me she's rather peeked looking. Are you sure she's strong enough to stand it?"

"Oh, she's wiry, and had splendid training. Stand it? to be sure. That's her business."

She stood it for a week, in fear of her very life, so much had she exaggerated Thomas' power over her. Indeed, she had some experience of the man's cruelty. Pinches and sly blows had left bruised spots on her body. Two or three times, in a drunken fit, he had kicked her. Then he had often threatened to put her in some institution as a refractory and disobedient child. His power over her seemed supreme, for there was no one to befriend her.

In private she suffered from the envy of Miss Rose De Vere, a coarse, common, ignorant girl, in spite of her aristocratic stage appellation. Had Titania been old enough to attract the admiration of lovers, Rose would have felt like dropping poison in her cup. As it was, she disparaged her in every possible way, sneered, and declared most of her feats were mere stage tricks, rather than any evidence of trained skill or innate agility.

She dragged her weary little frame to the theatre. Oh, what a ghastly, horrible mockery the lights and glare and coarse jollity seemed. The crowd of eager, almost brutish faces, intent only upon their two hours' amusement, but sharp to exact every whit, looked so pitiless to her. How she shrank from it all! Many a time before, the same cold shudder had sped through her nerves, but now it was intensified by pains that seemed to sting her in a thousand places at once, and a rush of burning heat that was torture.

Her feats and the flying leap had been performed. She sat huddled in a little heap in the dirty green-room, shivering one instant, and the next burning with fiery flashes. Her head was dizzy, the whole place whirled round, the figures of her compeers were grotesque, their voices appeared to come from some distant space, and mingled strangely in her ears. Oh, if she dared go home and crawl away to bed.

There followed a bit of burlesque, liberally adorned with street slang and the wildest of breakdowns, in which Miss Rose gayly disported herself, and was generously applauded, several bouquets being showered upon her. But the thorn among her roses was the next announcement on the programme, — "Wonderful performance of Queen Titania on the slack-rope." And then they would clap and stamp, and perhaps call out the pale-faced chit again! How she hated that little bundle done up in an old grey shawl, leaning against a bit of shifted side-scene. The

child had chosen the spot to get away from the noisy slang and merriment of the green-room.

"Come," said Thomas, "it's time you were pulling yourself together. Your toggery is all crushed, and you have no more pride in it than if it was made of tow-cloth. Get up."

She started, but staggered a few paces, and sank down again.

"Get up."

This time the order was enforced with his foot.

"Oh, Mr. Thomas, I can't go on again to-night. I am sick. I couldn't balance myself a moment."

There was a coarse laugh beside her.

"Well, you *can* put on airs, Miss!" said Rose De Vere, sharply.

"None of this! There's a call. They won't put up with any nonsense. Get up, I say."

There was a whistling in the gallery, and calls of various kinds.

Titania made an effort, but her face was ghastly, and her hands icy cold, stiff, as if frozen.

"Here, some of you, can't you put a bit of red in her cheeks. And take a mouthful of this," handing her his flask.

She shrank back, disgusted. Rose De Vere came forward with a saucer of rouge and a puff.

"I'll make you pretty for once. This is all airs, you know. You think you're a little too good,—hear the stamping, my darling!" said Rose, mockingly.

Thomas uttered a furious oath, and took her by the shoulder, starting her on a run.

"Look here," he cried, "you dare to fail, and I'll beat you black and blue! There won't be a whole bone left in your body!"

Rose watched her with a bitter glow in her jealous eyes, that could be so pitiless.

"She'll break her back or her neck, I don't much care which," muttered the girl; "she ain't fit to stand on no rope, and she can't more'n a minute. But that's Thomas' look out. I just wish he'd have to get out of this. I don't like two masters. How they do clap! Well, they won't clap long, or I'll miss my guess. If this thing goes on I'll quit. I won't have any one but Lily a sharin' honors with me, as King 'll find out afore he's much older."

Titania saw only a confused glimmer before her, though the applause that greeted her seemed like a crash of thunder to her poor, strained ears. She essayed to balance herself, and came down. Thomas darted forward, picked her up, and breathed a fearful imprecation to inspire her. The audience looked on curiously, and a daring voice uttered a hiss. It nerved her with desperation. A few wild, irregular motions, and then it seemed to her that the building fell, and she was buried in the crash.

This time she was insensible. They carried her off, a poor, thin, dead-looking child, and laid her on a heap of stage belongings. Thomas swore and blustered, and forced some brandy down her throat.

"Oh, she isn't dead, is she?" cried Lily, touched by the pitiful picture.

"If she's shamming she'll pay for it," was the cruel rejoinder.

The mob in the gallery were making themselves heard. They were not going to be deprived of five minutes' amusement if Queen Titania lay dying. They had paid their money —

"Rose, give them a break-down!" cried King. "Here, I'll announce you." Then to Thomas: "She won't be fit to go on again to-night."

Mr. King appeared before his audience, and was received with the lowering disrespect of the mob. He regretted to announce that Queen Titania had been seized with a sudden indisposition, and would be unable to finish her per-

formance; but she would appear as usual to-morrow evening. Miss Rose De Vere would favor the audience with one of her inimitable dances.

So the favorite, Rose, danced with a good will, since it seemed, almost, as if she was dancing on her rival's grave. Cruel, you say? But there are women who would sometimes be glad to bury a rival out of sight with less cause than this selfish Rose De Vere.

They carried Titania to the comfortless boarding-house and laid her on the bed. Then a doctor was sent for, who declared the child in a fever, left a potion, and promised to drop in the next morning.

Poor little waif! Hard work, poor diet, exhaustion, friendlessness, and terror had done their worst. Day after day she tossed in a burning fever, uttering pitiful, pleading cries that would have moved almost any heart; but the landlady was too busy, the Misses De Vere had their own affairs, which were of much more importance. Indeed, after two days they had threatened to find a new boarding-house, as they did not consider it prudent to stay in the room with a fever case. So Titania was thrust in a sort of store-room, and left mostly alone; but she was not sensible of the neglect. As for Owen Thomas, he fretted and fumed, and cursed his luck, at the expenses that were going on, and the profits that had come to a stand-still.

"The child ought to go to a hospital," the doctor said, one morning. "She cannot be made comfortable here, and she needs a regular nurse. The worst of the fever is over, but it will be a lingering case, and I am afraid her spine has been seriously injured, she complains so much of her back. What kind of a fall did she have on that last evening?"

Thomas declared that it could not have been serious; it was from no great height. She had had worse falls, and only laughed at them.

"Her days of acrobatic performing are about over,"

was the reply. "It will take her a year or two to recover, if, indeed, she ever does. A delicate little girl like this, especially while growing, should not be subjected to such severe strains. It is cruel, inhuman. Is she your child?"

"Only a hired performer. She has been brought up to the business. If I had not hired her, some one else would."

That was the substance of Owen Thomas defence.

"Has the child no relatives, no friends?"

Thomas told all of her story that he knew. She was supposed to be the child of one Barretti, an acrobat of note. He was dead, and his wife had married again, and hired out the child.

The doctor sighed. He was not a sentimental man, and Titania, wan and wasted, would scarcely have stirred any one's heart by her beauty. But he thought she ought to be snatched out of this life; at all events she had better go to some place where quiet and cleanliness reigned.

"I will try to get her into a hospital, then. Shall it be as a paid patient?"

Thomas uttered an oath.

"I've nothing to pay with," he returned angrily. "I've had trouble enough with her already. If you want to send to Chippenham's agent I'll give you the address. I'll throw up my engagement, and write this very day. We'll see whether Chip'll be so high and mighty. The young 'un never was worth half what I've paid for her."

Mr. Roberts was duly notified. The abrupt termination of his promising engagement drove Thomas to the next lower round of drink and degradation. Luck had turned against him, and for a few weeks he rendered the life of his poor, patient helpmeet almost unendurable, when he was offered a position with a travelling show.

Meanwhile, after another wearing week, Titania was taken to a hospital. The fever lingered, though not in great violence, but much of the time her mind was wandering.

But oh how grateful seemed the clean pallet, the cool, sweet linen, the airy room! No noisy whistling or singing of street songs, no clatter up and down, no incessant buzz of machinery, shrieks of steam, and clang of bells.

She lay there day after day in a kind of dreamy content. After a while the old stage scenes and associations must inevitably return, but now it was the peace and beatitude of heaven. All she could do was to enjoy it with such a grateful heart that the angels themselves must have smiled over her.

Certain other events in her destiny went on. Owen Thomas dropped out of her life unknowingly. Roberts came to satisfy himself, breathing threats of a suit for damages, and found that there really was no proof that the child had been injured by the fall, or beaten, or anything that could stir up sentimental sympathy in a courtroom. Of the finer murder by inches the law takes no cognizance. King attested that the child was well treated, so far as he knew; Rose De Vere declared her an obstinate little thing; Mrs. Sims, the landlady, said there was always enough for her to eat, — none of her boarders found fault with her table, — but the child seemed very “finicky,” whatever that meant. The hospital doctor inveighed bitterly against the practice of training young children for such dangerous performances, and said the little girl would never be fit for it again; that it was an outrage on humanity, and a stop ought to be put to it by the strong hand of the law. The evening paper at L——, which was considered the best authority in town, had a warm and denunciatory article on the subject, and called upon public sentiment to put an end to this slaughter of the innocents. Then the ripple blew over, and the Odeon’s next acrobat was a wonderful little boy, who quite distanced Queen Titania.

Poor Queenie! Mr. Roberts wrote to her owners, Mr. and Mrs. Chippenham. He really, when it came to that,

you know, had no special instructions on the subject, and there was no money to take care of the child, and so on.

So Queenie lingered in the hospital, a grateful little girl. They had cut off her beautiful hair, and it was now a crop of short curls around her baby face, so white and wan. But the hospital was crowded, and she was sent to the Home of the Friendless, as a temporary expedient. She was not strong, and the least exertion tired her all out of breath. She had known so little of unrestrained childhood that she had no desire to join the noisy plays, and rather rude diversions. She liked to creep away by herself, and wonder about her dead mamma and Dick Bridger. Where were they? And was Maggie dead, too?

There had been so many changes in her life, such a series of abrupt and unexpected incidents, that she was like a little stray bark at sea; out of sight of the desired haven. She really hoped or expected nothing. The strong, natural buoyancy of childhood had been wrenched up by the roots. She hardly counted on Kate, now, and had forgotten her exact address. Yet she wrote to Paris, at a venture, and waited in a kind of sad, pitiful apathy. Something would come — happiness was so strange a thing that she did not pray for it. Indeed, she had lost faith in God. Sad, sad truth!

CHAPTER XVII.

MOVING ON TO THE NEXT.

AN elegant carriage drew up before the "Institution." It had once been quite a grand old country house, with a sloping lawn in front, and great wide-spread elms for sentinels. The time was July, a midsummer afternoon.

Two ladies alighted, and sauntered up the walk. A few groups of children at play eyed them askance. There was a wide, shady porch, and on this the lady patroness motioned the guest to a seat.

"Ask the matron to come out here," was the dignified request, something in the order of command. Then to her companion, "It is so much pleasanter here. These places invariably have a stuffy, disagreeable air to me, and the parlors are always gloomy. Ah, here comes Mrs. Post. This is my friend Mrs. Winstead, Mrs. Post."

The guest bowed haughtily, and shook the perfumes of Orient out of her India carriage-shawl, and sandal-wood fan. A woman, neither young nor handsome, and with an insufferable air of pride. The lady patroness was airy and stylish, but more approachable.

"We have come on quite a business matter," explained Mrs. Gaylord. "I have almost talked Mrs. Winstead into taking one of our little waifs. The good Lord does put it in some one's heart now and then to provide for the needy and homeless, and assist us in our great and charitable work. Let us see some of your nicest little girls, Mrs. Post. This lady wants one who is capable of being trained into a waiting-maid for her daughter. She will have one of the best of homes."

Mrs. Gaylord spoke as if she were conferring a great favor on Mrs. Post; but the matron was quite used to this sort of patronage.

"Kitty," she called to one of the girls, who shyly obeyed the summons, "will you see that Laura and Molly, and that pale little Annie are put in order, and sent here?"

Some moments elapsed, while the three ladies conversed about the Institution and its workings, the waifs and strays who had found shelter and homes. Then there was a mysterious little cough in the hall. Mrs. Post rose.

"This is Laura Smith," she began, presenting a bright, black-eyed child. "She is eleven, and an orphan; a quick, apt scholar, with quite a fancy for the needle. I think she could be trained into a very useful little hand-maiden. And this is Molly Benson—we have four Marys," and Mrs. Post smiled. "Where is Annie, Laura?"

"Getting washed and brushed," responded Laura, promptly.

"Molly would make a very good waitress, I think; oh, and here is Annie!"

A pale, slender little girl, with curling golden hair, and large brown eyes. She was neither shy nor over bold.

"This child has had quite a romantic history, but she has neither parent nor friends, I believe. She came here from the hospital, in June; and though she looks delicate, is quite strong now."

Mrs. Winstead drew her brows a little. What right had this street waif to such a faultless complexion, such large, wonderful eyes, and above all to hair of that peculiar tint and fineness!

"I have felt that this child ought to be adopted by some one," said Mrs. Post. "I suppose there are people who would be very glad to get her."

Mrs. Winstead studied the slender little thing. Her creed was that no child or woman, except those with unlimited money in their purses, and blue blood in their

veins, should be the possessor of a tithe of beauty. That should be reserved, as an inalienable birthright, for the higher classes. If *she* had made the world there would be none of these stupid mistakes! The working classes should carry the sign manual on their foreheads.

"Wasn't this the child Mrs. Day spoke of adopting?"

"Yes, but Mr. Day was very particular about blue eyes. She was so sorry."

"I think those quiet looking children are either stolid or have very bad tempers," said Mrs. Winstead.

"I can assure you Annie is neither," Mrs. Post rejoined, warmly. "She is very easy to get along with; indeed, she is just the child to be adopted into a pleasant home."

Mrs. Winstead thought of the possibility of some one adopting her, educating her, bringing her up to be a lady, and her marrying in the charmed circle. There was an air of what would be called birth and refinement about her, and girls of this stamp always were ambitious. Would it not be a mercy for her to be strictly reared — made to know her place from the outset?

It was curious that she should dislike the child, and yet almost desire her. Indeed, when it came to that, why would not this child do as well as any other? She would risk training her.

"Can you assure me that she is perfectly honest and truthful?" she asked, quite sharply.

"Annie? Oh, yes."

"And not ill tempered? She would be brought into personal contact with my own daughter, and I must have a high moral tone. It is one of the things that I insist upon in my household," was the haughty rejoinder.

"She is a very good little girl. Still you might like Laura better. She would be more amusing."

"I do not desire her for amusement," said the lady, stiffly. "Her chief duty would be to wait upon my daughter, to learn to sew, and as she grew older to attend

to the finer part of laundry work, laces, and so on ; in short, I should bring her up for a lady's maid.

Mrs. Gaylord interposed with her flowery adornments of speech. The poor little thing would have such an excellent home, really, it was one chance out of a thousand; and it was so much better that these poor waifs should be put in a way of earning a living in an honest, respectable manner; and a great deal about the beauty and delight of charity, in a glowing, sentimental way, as if Mrs. Winstead, in her generosity, would give everything, and the child would be the recipient of boundless blessings.

There followed some questions as to the child's age and former life. Mrs. Post answered briefly that her parents were dead, that she had been taken by a family where the gentleman had died, and his wife married again, that she had been sick in a hospital, and from thence transferred to the Home. Twice before she had stated frankly that the child had been a stage performer, at which her would-be patrons had shrunk in dismay. No, they could not think of taking such associations into pure homes. So it was wisest, she thought, not to mention it if it was to stand in the way of her advancement. Mrs. Gaylord was ignorant of her antecedents. Mrs. Post had given her the name of Annie, in place of the stage name grown so sadly familiar, "Queenie." Dick Bridger's pet appellation was too tender and endearing to be used by strangers.

Mrs. Post placed very little reliance on the Chippenham interest. It appeared to her that when the child ceased to be pecuniarily profitable they would be glad to throw her off, as a burden. Titania shrank from the old life, and the kind-hearted matron felt that it was, indeed, a terrible destiny for womanhood. She hoped that some affectionate household would adopt her, and she was not prepossessed in Mrs. Winstead's favor.

"It might be better to have a stronger child for that purpose," began the matron.

"Any child is strong enough to run up and down stairs with a message, or carry a shawl," said that lady, disdainfully. "There is too much sentimental charity, nowadays, that floods the world with miserable, arrogant servants, and the only true system is to bring up these foundling children to know their places, to make useful members of society. If this could be done we should not hear so much of depraved women and outcasts."

"Very true! too true!" fluttered Mrs. Gaylord, with uplifted hands and heavenward eyes.

Mrs. Winstead decided in her mind to take that particular child. She held a curious spite against her because she dared to be beautiful, — as if it was some acquired fault of her own. There would be no foolish nonsense in her training.

"I will consider the subject, and decide," the lady announced, loftily.

"You might try her," insisted Mrs. Gaylord. "You can take her for a month, and return her if she should not suit."

"I never act upon a hasty resolve," said Mrs. Winstead, with the air of an empress, as she swept down the steps.

"I wish she would take Laura or Molly," commented Mrs. Post.

"Will I have to go with her?" questioned the child. "Can't I wait and see if Kate will not send for me?" and her pathetic eyes filled with tears.

"If she *did* send I would be sure to let you know. I do not take much of a fancy to Mrs. Winstead, myself, yet I am not sure but it would be better than going out as a nurse girl, and dragging a baby about. You don't look strong enough for such work."

They heard nothing for two days. Some new children were admitted, and the accommodations were much straitened, it must be confessed. When the two ladies reappeared there was no reason to urge why Titania should

not go. Mrs. Post's motherly heart might be large enough to keep them all, but the purse of the Home certainly was not. Titania said her good-by with a strangling sob in her throat. Like poor Joe, her destiny seemed to be a continual "moving on."

Mrs. Winstead had her trunk at the railroad station, and went thither herself with her little maid. She allowed her to sit in the seat with her, and hold her elegant Russia-leather satchel, which was much too nice to be put on the floor. There was a three-hours' ride, and then they stopped.

Arlington was a lovely, sleepy old town, famous for its blue blood and aristocratic proclivities. It was disfigured by no factories, no shops. The banks of its placid river purled through greenest vales; its two old churches were ivy grown, and perhaps the most pretentious thing in it was a Young Ladies Institute, and boarding-school. That, too was conducted on extremely exclusive principles. The Misses Chapman prided themselves upon the unexceptional tone of their Institute, — which meant that no young lady was received for less than six hundred a year.

There was Rose Lawn, Heath House, the Cedars, Livingston Hall, and so on. The Winstead place was called the "Oaks," perhaps from the great grove of oaks at the rear. It had been in the family upwards of a hundred years, had descended to Anthony Winstead quite heavily mortgaged, and indeed, would have slipped out of his hands but for his wife.

She and her mother had managed an imposing position on a very frail tenure. It had sufficed to launch her into matrimony. With the small amount of money left she had done some new furnishing, and then began a system of most rigorous internal economy. The coachman, and his wife Mary, lived at the Lodge, and Mary was general housemaid and cook, except on extra occasions. One bound girl had been taken in the house, who, the day she was

eighteen, had gone off joyfully to try the world for herself. There was a kitchen-girl for the roughest work, and Mary, rather proud of her importance, still held sway.

The family consisted of a son and a daughter: Archibald, eighteen, and Helena, fifteen, who was her mother's pride. Part of the time Helena had a governess, a very well-informed widow lady, whose leisure hours were employed at dress-making, but who, somehow, had finally declined the honor of living with "one of the first families," and being worked sixteen hours out of the twenty-four.

Now Miss Helena was to take two more years of finishing at the Institute, and the young man was to go to college. The financial aspect had cleared a little under Mrs. Winstead's thrifty management, but it was still sharp and close. Moreover, she preferred assistants in this good work who had no ties in the town, and no right to go out for a bit of gossip.

The carriage was in waiting. Sam touched his hat to his mistress, and helped her in with a flourish, then looked oddly at the child.

"She will go home with me," said Titania's new mistress.

It was not much of a ride. They drove up the broad avenue, under the arching trees. The grass was like velvet. Beds of flowers and leaf plants were cut here and there, in a tiny star or circle. A great, white vase, full of creepers and brilliant scarlet bloom stood on one side of the portico. A flight of broad steps led to the entrance.

Titania paused, and drew a long breath, the beauty and order filling her heart with a strange sense of exaltation. Was this really to be her home? This pure, sweet air; this glory of sun, and cool, green depths of shade; this affluence of light, and color, and harmony! It struck home to her with such an overwhelming sense of deliciousness that she could only look and breathe.

"Follow me," said her mistress, sternly. "Ah, Mary, how do you do? Where are the family?"

"A thousand welcomes home!" and Mary courtesied. "The young people have gone to a croquet party, ma'am, and the master —"

At that instant Mr. Winstead made his appearance. A tall, rather spare man, with an indolent look, and bearing in his face traces of his recent nap. He received his wife with a graciously cordial air, and made polite inquiries concerning her journey, her friends, commented on the warmth of the weather, and looked askance at the child, until curiosity could no longer be repressed.

"Why, what have you brought home?" he asked.

"I told you if I saw a child to my fancy I should take one," replied Mrs. Winstead, rather sharply. "Helena needs some one to wait upon her, and so, for that matter, do I."

"But she seems so small, — so —"

"There is room enough for her to grow, I suppose. She is somewhere about twelve."

"I was eleven in May," said Titania, quietly.

"Speak when you are spoken to," was the brief command. "That is certainly old enough for a child that you desire to train."

"But you had so much trouble with that Martha, and she proved so ungrateful."

"Yes, I must say it was horrible ingratitude, when I had kept her through the most trying years, and given her such good training, to go just when she was beginning to be useful. Very few women would have the courage to try again. But this poor thing seemed so in want of home and friends that it was really a charity."

"Yet she has a curious look of —"

"Don't begin by commenting on the child's appearance, Mr. Winstead. You do not expect style and cultivation in a street foundling."

"But she has just that, I was going to say" —

"And I beg you will not be so foolish," in a tone of asperity; "I am completely tired out. Here, child, lay my bonnet on the bed yonder, and my shawl. Don't string it up in that careless fashion; fold it. Lay off your own hat, and then unbutton my boots. The sooner you learn your new duties the better. You may be dismissed," with a careless nod to her husband.

They had come up-stairs to Mrs. Winstead's sleeping-room, — a spacious apartment, handsomely furnished in a somewhat old-fashioned, massive style. The lighter appointments were more modern, and gave it an air of grace.

Titania stood quite bewildered by the strangeness, and terrified somewhat by the voice of her new mistress.

"Do you hear me? Or, first, go to that closet yonder, and in the box you will find a pair of slippers, — those with steel buckles, — bring them with you."

Titania found the slippers. The lady stretched her tired feet on the hassock, and the little maid commenced operations. She had learned to be both quick and deft.

"Now take these in the room there," nodding toward a door, "and in the bottom of the dressing-table you will find a cloth. Dust them off nicely, especially about the buttons. I am very particular."

This was done with no blundering, and they were restored to the box. Then the shawl was laid in a drawer, the gloves and bonnet in their respective places. All with a quiet movement, and touches of dexterous grace.

"I was not wrong," thought Mrs. Winstead. "My intuitions seldom deceive me, and my penetration is rarely at fault. Laura looked stronger, but she would have been loud and aggressive, and this one can be kept in order with less trouble. I think she *will* answer; but I can take the month to make up my mind."

"What is your other name beside Annie?" the lady asked aloud.

"My name is not Annie at all," was the dignified answer, "it is — Titania Barretti."

She made a just perceptible pause before she uttered it, and then flushed a little as she remembered that it was not her true name. Mrs. Post had charged her to make no explanations, as the worthy woman felt confident the story of her stage-life would be something of a stigma. The Odeon, with its performers and patrons, was not in very good repute at L——. That her position had once been much higher never occurred to Mrs. Post.

"What an outlandish name!" exclaimed Mrs. Winstead, sneeringly. "But people of your class generally do indulge in extravagant patronymics. I can have no such foolishly romantic names in my house, and for a servant a good plain name is much the best."

"A servant!" And all Titania's spirit flashed up in her face.

"Do you suppose I brought you here to be a lady? If so, you had better march back to your charitable institution. I am amazed at you!"

And now poor, trembling, flushing Titania was ashamed of herself, and sorely bewildered. What right had anybody to send her here? And yet who was there to care for her. Mr. Roberts had said, "Really I have no instructions to do anything for the child, and if she should never be strong enough to perform again," — and the doctor had answered, "You may set your mind at rest on that point, she never will."

Until she heard from Kate, — that was all her hope. And though the surprised and indignant blood mounted her cheek, she felt so powerless that her little hands dropped by her side, and her soft eyes were downcast.

"Yes, a servant," continued Mrs. Winstead, transfixing the child with her haughty mien; "you may as well understand your place at once. I have brought you here for a waiting-maid for my daughter and myself; at least I shall

see if you have any aptitude for that position. You will give yourself no airs, and indulge in no impertinence. It is a thing I *never* take from an inferior. If you prove intractable, and unworthy of my benevolent intentions, I shall send you back to that home of charity from whence I took you, disgraced, yes, absolutely disgraced. If you suit me you may have a home for years. But I will have no foolishness."

Titania was silent. The whole world seemed to revolve about her, and the events of her life were mingled in such grotesque succession that she felt herself helpless to evolve but one idea, — in August Kate would send for her. She would live until then, get over the weary days and nights in any fashion, — what did it matter. This would be better than her life with that horrible drunken Thomas.

"And now you must have a decent, appropriate name. That fantastical thing shall never be uttered in my presence. Let me see — Jane will do, I think. Jane is a good, strong name, and short, and just the thing for a person in your station. Jane Barrett, that will do very well. Now, Jane, follow me to the kitchen, and I will endeavor to explain your new life to you. I am very particular and systematic, and there is nothing like making a good beginning."

While Mrs. Winstead was talking she had divested herself of her travelling attire, and donned an elegant white wrapper, that was a mass of puffs and frills, and whose snowy train floated around her. Motioning to Titania she led the way through the spacious hall, down the wide stairway, and opening a door at the back of the lower hall they descended another stairway. The house stood on a slight eminence, and the kitchen was at the back, quite out of sight, a sort of basement. It was here that Mary reigned, with her factotum Hannah.

It was large, clean, and convenient, and the floor had a refreshing, newly-scrubbed appearance. Mrs. Winstead

gave a sharp glance around, opened a closet door, and peered in, examined the sink, and then turned to Mary.

"Really, you have the place in quite decent order," she said, though it seemed unwilling praise. "I hope you have kept everything else right, and did you pay attention to the accounts, as I requested? Has Hannah made herself useful? Nothing is so discouraging as for the mistress of a house to come home and find such painful evidences of heedlessness and incompetency, as is too often the case."

"Indeed, I've tried my very best, ma'am, and I think you'll find nothing wrong. Here's the 'counts, ma'am," and Mary brought out her big kitchen-book.

"Accounts, Mary. How often have I told you that such things betray a gross ignorance. If, for a moment, you observe the habits of cultivated people, and certainly every servant who has the privilege of living with a refined family should, you will see they never indulge in such elisions."

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Mary, making a profound courtesy.

The lady examined the book, found fault with a few items, — it was an article of Mrs. Winstead's creed that unqualified praise demoralized servants, and destroyed authority.

"And you had a pleasant time, ma'am," Mary ventured, when she found that her mistress was in quite a placable mood.

"Very fair, considering the warm weather, and everything. Of course I should not have gone to the city in the heat of midsummer if Mrs. Gaylord had not so insisted upon it, and made arrangements to leave for Europe so soon. And she over-persuaded me into a rather foolish step, I am afraid, although I have not taken it irrevocably. I did mean some time to look for a little girl who could be brought up as Miss Helena's maid, but Mrs. Gaylord was

deeply interested in a charitable institution, and induced me to visit the place, and once there the sight appealed so to my finer feeling. There were waifs and strays with no homes and no friends, the class, which, if neglected, forms so large a part of our dangerous population, and fills our prisons. And so I took this little thing out of pure charity. She had been ill in a hospital before she was sent there."

"And she's but a slender slip now," added Mary, eying the child rather distrustfully.

"Yes. I shall keep her a month, and see how I like her. It depends upon her good behavior whether she has a pleasant and easy home, or whether she must go drifting round the world. Her name is Jane Barrett. Jane, this is Mary, my housekeeper, and this is Hannah. I shall want to send you up and down stairs now and then, and you will know where to come."

The child bowed with a proud, instinctive grace, that rather shocked her mistress.

"I hope she'll suit, and that you'll have no trouble with her, but she looks weakly, like."

"How could you expect them to look any better, poor half-starved things, living in such miserable holes as the most of them do! It is a great charity to snatch them from that terrible life. Now, Jane, we will go up-stairs again. There will be no one at dinner but Mr. Winstead and myself."

Mary understood what that meant. The table would be as elegantly set, and the meal served with due ceremony, but there would be no needless expense in the viands. The meat might be divided for the next morning's breakfast.

Then Jane was introduced to the third floor. There was an old-fashioned double-pitched roof on the house. Two very nice, spacious sleeping-rooms, a store-room, and a smaller chamber, with a very plain bedstead and wash-stand.

"This will be your room. Hannah sleeps at the Lodge, with Mary. I have a great objection to servants staying in the house all night, unless they are particularly needed."

Then they turned to Mrs. Winstead's apartment, and the little handmaiden underwent a rigorous examination. Could she dust a room, or sew, or iron, or make herself useful in any way? Why, what a poor, helpless little thing she was! Of course she knew nothing about waiting on a table, she had probably never seen a decent table in her life.

Barretti's little queen preserved a discreet silence. After all it would be only for a few weeks. But she cried herself to sleep that night with a sad, lonely feeling, a despair pitiful in one so young.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PALACE OR PRISON.

QUEEN TITANIA found her palace not far from a prison, and her life one of intolerable slavery. Miss Helena was more consequential than her mother, and quite as rigorous. Not a moment in the day was she allowed to be idle. Mrs. Winstead soon saw that she possessed an unusual aptitude for acquiring anything about which there was room for the slightest grace. She could wait upon the table, usher visitors into a room, carry a shawl and fan, and run of errands, — and she was so quiet.

Mary inclined to the opinion that she was a rather sullen little thing. Her visits to the kitchen were very brief, except when she came for her meals.

The new existence bewildered Titania. It appeared first like the mimic life of the stage, and had for her the same unreal air. She could not understand how she had drifted into it, although the few surface facts were easy enough of comprehension. There had been no one to take care of her; and, beside, not being strong enough to endure her former life she shrank from it now with a deadly horror. She felt within herself the instinct of hiding, like some poor hunted animal. But that she should be here compelled to menial occupations, ordered to fetch and carry like a dog, taunted with being an object of charity, listening occasionally when Mrs. Winstead explained to her friends how her sympathies had been touched, how she had burdened herself with a child who could be of very little use for a year or two to come; but when one saw these

countless waifs in great cities one longed to reach out a helping hand, and save them from lives of infamy.

Titania's blood rose hot within her at these wordy falsehoods. Was she not giving her daily toil for the plain attic, and common fare? For, however elegant the table might be in the dining-room its luxuries did not descend to the kitchen. The choice desserts and fruits, the savory meats, were set aside. Mrs. Winstead certainly had made management a fine art. She and her daughter went clad in silks and laces, the table was a picture, with its choice and costly appointments and dainty fare, but the thrift back of it all was surprising. Not a pin was wasted. Not a crumb that could be turned into anything else was thrown away. No idleness was tolerated in a dependent.

And yet, in spite of the drawbacks, Titania almost revelled in a sense of beauty. The old town was so lovely, even when she walked behind Miss Helena, carrying basket, or satchel, or shawl. The house and grounds, the furniture, carpets, and pictures, were each a revelation in themselves. She drank in the refinement, the harmony, the culture, with the eagerness of a thirsty traveller. She had enjoyed a certain luxurious life with Kate, but that had been tinctured with vulgarity, and lacked the fine adjustments. This was intensely selfish in many points, and they would gladly have crowded her out of the æsthetical side if they could, but she kept these dreams of delight closely within her heart, and waited. She had needed so much patience in her short life!

Beside the overbearing authority of the women she was tormented with a covert insolence and cruelty from Mr. Archie, the son of the house. He liked to tease her, just as he teased the cat and the dog; nay, it was more amusement, because he could rouse her soul, startle her into some demonstration of impatience or anger. Not often, it was true. She feared him, and sought shelter under his mother's wing, where she knew he would not dare molest her.

So passed away a month. Regular living and wholesome sleep began to show their beneficial effects. The wan face filled out, and now and then flushed with exquisite pink tints. The little white fingers looked less like claws, and there came to her an almost exultant strength in place of the dreary languor. The terrible weakness in her back was quite forgotten on some days.

"Really, mamma, mine," exclaimed Archie, one morning, "I must compliment you upon the improvement in your handmaiden. She looks less like a human spider, and will, no doubt, become an ornament to the Oaks, though I think people rarely choose pretty servants. If she is to be Helena's property will not the contrast between mistress and maid be too great?"

Miss Winstead at sixteen was large and mature-looking. Nature had formed her on a generous model. Her features were not fine, and certainly far from any point of symmetrical beauty; her hands and feet could lay no claim to Cinderella-like proportions. Her hair was brown, and abundant, but unfortunately her complexion was not of the kind for an harmonious contrast, being neither "wholly dark, nor fair." Indeed, Mr. Archibald had taken what little family beauty there was to inherit, and was rather proud of it.

"Archibald," said his mother, severely, "I wish you would pay a little attention to the rules of good-breeding. No gentleman, I think, is called upon to discuss his mother's servants."

"I merely made a comment. You must admit that she has improved wonderfully. And she has magnificent eyes. Now, Lena, if you possessed such orbs what execution might you not do among the sterner sex?"

Helena flushed swarthily. Celestial rosy-red was not among her tints.

"At least, Archibald, you can refrain from insulting your

sister. I wish to hear no more upon the subject," was the pointed reply.

Mr. Archie gave a little laugh, and sipped his coffee. He could afford to try his mother's temper since he was to go away in a few days.

After he had left the room Helena glanced up at her mother. The worthy matron's brow was somewhat ruffled.

"I am not quite sure but Archie is right, mamma," she said, in a tone of annoyance. "That child is too pretty for a servant. There is something about her that I do not exactly understand,—the thing that we should call birth in another person. It seems impossible to put her down, because she is not outwardly self-assertive, and yet she shows her pride in every step, in every word."

"Birth and pride! What are you talking about, Helena? It is our duty to make her know her place. A child picked out of the gutter."

"She seems to keep her place, that is the worst of it. She gives one very few chances to snub her. I sometimes think she has seen more of the world, and is wiser than we imagine, she has such a peculiar air about her. And I don't see what need a girl in her station has of such a faultless complexion, or such perfect features! And the tint of her hair is enough to madden one!"

Helena's smouldering fire burst out then. The child's beauty had become a grievance to her.

Mrs. Winstead glanced at her daughter. Jane, as she persisted in calling the child, had been a sort of under-current of dissatisfaction.

"I must say I did not consider Jane especially pretty when I saw her at the Home. That she has improved, I am sorry to confess, as beauty in her station is only a snare and an evil. But whether it would be worth while to give her up on that account; for she learns very quickly, and is already exceedingly useful. She waits on the table much better than Hannah, she is learning to sew neatly, and has

a wonderful taste in arrangement. She is just the girl to become invaluable to one, unless — ”

“ Unless Archie should fall in love with her ! ” and Helena felt that she had thrown a bomb into the camp.

“ Helena ! ” Mrs. Winstead was an exclamation point.

“ Well, the like has happened,” retorted Helena, sulkily.

“ How utterly absurd ! I doubt if the child is twelve years old, and for the next three years Archie will be in college. During that time he will find no scarcity of handsome girls. After all, there is plenty of this pink-and-white baby beauty in the world ; and I should keep Jane strictly under my own eye. Besides, do you imagine Archibald would so demean himself ? ”

“ He wouldn’t marry her, of course,” said Miss Helena ; “ but even a flirtation might be uncomfortable.”

Mrs. Winstead laughed scornfully.

“ Don’t distress yourself about that, my dear. I fancy I should be quite equal to such an emergency.”

Helena did not bring forth a still more potent argument, on a point that might affect her more than the dreaded flirtation. She hated the little flings of contrast of which Archibald was so fond. To be exposed to them, sharp little wasp stings as they would prove, appeared almost unendurable.

“ Besides, Helena, pretty children invariably make plain women. This girl at sixteen may have nothing noticeable about her. Complexions fade, and her hair will change to a dull brown.”

“ But she has fine eyes ; unusual eyes.”

“ And I may not keep her,” continued Mrs. Winstead, dryly. “ I certainly shall not sacrifice the well-being of my family to her. There, I think we have discussed the child quite enough. She is not worth such a fuss.”

With that Mrs. Winstead rose loftily, and, ringing the bell, summoned Jane to wash the silver and clear away the lunch-dishes. The servants partook of their dinner

exactly at twelve, in the kitchen. Lunch for the family was at one.

The remnants of the dinner of the day before generally served for lunch, and, though Titania sometimes coveted the luxuries she put away, pride would have prevented her touching them, if she had not been so strictly forbidden.

Helena went to her room, and her novel. Mrs. Winstead inspected her handmaiden's work, the ripping of some dresses that were to be made over into elegant fall garments. There certainly was no fault to find. The little fingers had been deft and industrious; and yet the lady drew her brows into a severe frown.

Titania entered the room presently. Her dress was of dingy gray, a faded lawn, made with no ornamentation whatever, except the frill of the same around the neck. But the pearly, satin-fine skin seemed lovelier by contrast, and the rapid exercise had brought a delicate pink to her cheeks, while her small scarlet mouth was the one touch of brilliance enhancing the whole.

The dull, jealous hate with which Titania had at first inspired Mrs. Winstead returned with tenfold force. She could have destroyed the winsome beauty forever, had such a thing been possible, and answered to her conscience that it was for the child's good. There was one thing that she could do.

"Jane," she said in a peremptory manner, "bring me a cloth of some kind — a piece of that skirt-lining will do. There, sit here on this stool, and pin it tightly about your neck."

The child sat down, then she turned, and asked rather abruptly, moved by a sudden presentiment,

"What are you going to do?"

"Make you look rather more respectable," replied the lady, in a sharp tone. "A frousy-headed servant I cannot endure."

"You shall not cut my hair!" and Titania's hands went

up to defend her precious curls, shorn of so much glory in the hospital, where it had been absolutely necessary.

"What!" demanded Mrs. Winstead. "You insolent little thing to dare use such language to me! Put down your hands this moment."

"You shall not," cried the child; "it is my hair; you have no right!" — and she faced her mistress with the same air of resolute defiance with which she had once confronted Dick Bridger.

For answer she received a blinding, stinging blow, that made the room whirl around to her dazed vision.

"You insolent little huzzy, I'll teach you to speak to me in that manner!" and Titania felt herself seized by a strong arm, and held as if in a vice, while the clip of the scissors rang in her ears.

"Oh, don't, don't!" she implored, "please don't. I will do everything you tell me, and not waste my time. I will be so good, only don't cut it, please!"

Alas! the ruthless scissors made quick work of it. Holding her with one hand with the other she sped on the work of destruction. The soft, golden curls fell about the floor, quivering as if they, too, suffered at being severed from the fair head.

"I'll teach you to be such a fury! I should think you would be ashamed of such a frightful temper! That is the way you thank me for my kindness in picking you out of the street, as one may say."

"Oh, if you only had not taken me! If you had left me with kind Mrs. Post. If you *will* send me back again!" sobbed the child.

"Turn around."

She obeyed, the tears streaming from her eyes. Resistance was useless, for the cruel deed was well-nigh accomplished.

"I want you to understand that I am mistress, and that I expect my servants to obey me," said Mrs. Winstead,

with a glance that almost quenched the spirit of the child; "I shall *not* send you back to Mrs. Post, but have you bound immediately. Here you remain until you are eighteen. Dare to go away and you shall be arrested, and put in prison as a common vagrant. Venture to defy me, as you have done to-day, and you will learn what sort of punishment I can inflict. Go to your room and wash your face, and brush the hair out of your dress. Or stay — clear up this litter, first."

Titania went for the brush and pan, and carefully removed the obnoxious curls, together with the shreds of her ripping.

"Take it down-stairs, and tell Mary to put it in the fire," was the next order.

Down she crept tremblingly. For some seconds she stood at the door, when a little sob caught Hannah's ear.

"Oh, lauk a massy!" cried Hannah, startled out of her wonted prudence and stolidity; "what a fright you're made, sure enough. Who did it?"

"Mrs. Winstead. And I hate her!"

The child's soft-brown eyes flashed fire.

"Well, that's mean enough, goodness knows! I'd a fit like a tiger. And, oh, them soft, beautiful curls! Why, they look a'most human. Oh, how could she!"

"Hannah, attend to your own business," exclaimed Mary, who in turn domineered over her underling; "the mistress is right. Such flummery isn't becoming to girls! I never wore a curl in my life."

Indeed, it would have been a task to manufacture curls out of Mary's stiff, black locks.

Then she turned sharply on Titania.

"What are you going to do with that stuff?"

"I was — to put it in the fire," and the words came brokenly.

"Best place for it, I'm sure. Well, I wouldn't be such a fool as to cry over it."

Titania wiped her eyes, and left the kitchen, followed by Hannah's sympathetic looks, which were some comfort.

"Why did you not stay all the afternoon?" was Mrs. Winstead's greeting. "Now, go and make yourself decent, and hurry, too, or I'll know the reason."

She bathed her eyes, and wept some bitter tears in the bowl of water. Then she summoned courage to glance at herself in the bit of glass over the washstand.

Sheared close to her head,—just a sort of golden fuzz, with here and there a little lock that had escaped the devastating hand. She shuddered, and her eyes filled with slow tears again. Hannah had said she was a fright. Oh, how horrible it was! And if Mrs. Winstead would never let it grow again!

"Jane, are you coming?" was the sharp call; and hastily giving herself a brush, she ran down.

"Take your work again. That dress must be finished by night. Stop crying instantly. Tears will ruin that silk. If you were as vain as that, it is high time some stop was put to your foolishness," and the severe eyes transfixed her.

Every nerve quivered as if under torture. All her life, so far, she had been in some one's power. Dick Bridger had come to love her, the sweet reward she could never forget; but this cold, haughty woman, was only a remove from Owen Thomas. And she had struck her a blow! Her cheek still tingled, and the print of the cruel fingers seemed burnt into it. Was she compelled to stay here? Had those people any right to deliver her into a stranger's keeping? Oh, if Kate would but write! There was one week more before August ended, and it seemed to Titania that she must hear. The tears dried of their own accord, and a burning, fiery indignation took possession of her. When Kate sent, she would go off in triumph. She would show Mrs. Winstead that she was to be no one's servant.

She finished her ripping, and then was summoned to

wait upon the table. Miss Helena had been carried off to ride by a friend. Titania entered the dining-room with a shame-faced air, and stood behind the master while he carved.

Mr. Winstead was not much more than the ornamental head of the house. He had long since ceased to be the ruling spirit. His library, and his books, and a few friends to discuss Utopian theories with, amply satisfied him. True, he attended his wife to evening parties or dinners, and occasionally drove out with her. His tall, rather spare, but undeniably aristocratic figure, answered the same purpose as a Sevres vase, in his wife's estimation. His family were among the oldest settlers in the town, and had always been gentlemen.

So it came to pass that he troubled himself very little about his wife's arrangements. Servants might come and go, be dressed in velvet or sackcloth, and he would not have remarked it so long as the meals were properly served, and no unusual disorder in the house.

But Mr. Archie was of quite another stamp, and the child had an instinctive dread of him. Now he looked her all over, and then raised his eyes to his mother's face with an air of deliberate, but somewhat quizzical, questioning. Titania's brow flushed scarlet, and her hand trembled so that it took a most resolute endeavor to command herself, and keep from dropping the plate she held. It was such a bitterly cruel mortification, the more, perhaps, because so early in life she had come to understand the true value of beauty, and its wondrous power. A tear dropped quietly on the floor. Evade the insolent scrutiny she could not, but when the dessert had been brought on, and the serving ended, she turned to go down-stairs to her own meal.

"Jane," said her mistress, peremptorily, "sit there by the window. You are to stay, hereafter, until the meal is finished."

She crept to a corner instead, anywhere to be out of sight of the mocking eyes.

"Jane!" The tone was threatening.

The child went to the window, and sat in the strong light of the brilliant sunset. An artist would have discerned a picture in the poor, frightened face, beautiful in spite of its recent despoilment, with the peculiar infantile transparency of an invalid. Nothing could mar the pure oval contour, the softness of the cleft chin, with its dainty dimple; the low, broad, full brow, the exquisitely carved ear, that looked like a bit of pearly sea-shell.

Archibald gave a low chuckle, but his mother frowned sternly. When they rose from the table he lingered, going to the cigar tray for a match, and then wandering aimlessly about, with his eyes on Titania as she removed the dessert dishes. They went down on the dumb-waiter, and a bowl of water was sent up to wash the silver. She could hide herself in the capacious pantry to do that, and she was so thankful to be out of sight.

Mrs. Winstead came in to inspect the work, and found some trivial fault. She was in a most captious and exacting mood; but Titania went swiftly through her task, and when not another duty remained she was allowed to go down to the kitchen for her supper.

Scarcely had she passed the door before Archie burst into a coarse laugh.

"Well, you have done it this time, mother! In trying to disfigure a nymph you have given us a fright for a waiter. Was that Helena's petty spite? It was so like a plain woman."

"Helena had nothing to do with it. The child's head was a great yellow mop, and a frowsy table-waitress is my abomination. Besides, it is a good thing for the child's foolish vanity, and she has enough of it."

"For Heaven's sake don't have her around if there

should happen to be any visitors. I should be mortified to death at the sight of such a brat."

Mrs. Winstead bit her lip, and left her son to his reflections. Thank heaven he would be away presently, and another summer — but that was a long way off, and she would find some means of providing for it.

Titania, meanwhile, was faring hardly in the kitchen. When the dinner was sent up Mary's work for the day was over, and she went home immediately, the remainder of the evening being her own, except upon state occasions. Hannah remained to wash the dishes and tidy the place, for the mistress' lynx-like eyes might descend upon the slightest omission.

So now Hannah was cross at the delay, and the supper consisted of a few cold bits, that did not look very inviting even if the child had been hungry. But her inmost soul was filled with despairing anguish, and she could not have eaten even if it had been a royal banquet.

"Hurry up," she said, snappishly. "I can't be waiting all night for dishes. Why didn't you come afore?"

"Mrs. Winstead kept me until they were all through. But, Hannah, I don't care for any supper, and I will help you dry the dishes."

"No you won't, either. Mistress'll find it out some way, and make an awful row. She's a sharp woman, she is! If that's being a great lady, and having a pedigree hung up in a libery, why I don't know as it makes better tempers than common folks; and though she sows money broad-cast in the parlor, she'll skin a flint in the kitchen. You poor little thing!" — and here Hannah's heart began to melt, — "you look just like a half-starved lamb, strayed away from its mother. Here, you shall have a bit of this custard, and a peach. I smuggled it myself."

"Oh, Hannah, you are so good!" and Titania's voice quivered with the effort she made to keep from crying.

"No, I ain't. I'm cross as fury! And I don't see what

right she had to cut off your pretty hair! I'd a scratched her eyes out."

"Oh, I couldn't. She was so strong," said Titania, simply. "Do I look so very, very dreadful, Hannah?"

"Well, it's a shame, a burning and crying shame, you see," said Hannah, eying her with great deliberation, "but I can't say that it has altogether spoiled your beauty. An' then hair'll grow again — that's its nature; but she'll never let it curl, you mind that!" and the girl gave an emphatic shake of the head. "I think you're a main pretty little creature, and look a thousand times more like a lady than the whole raft of them all. 'Pears to me tain't nothing but money and a fine house, and knowing how 'to play on the pianner. Why, if you were dressed up fine, now, the great folks would go wild about you."

A flush of pleasure transfigured Titania's face. She remembered when great folks had gone wild about her. There came over her an intense desire to impart to Hannah some episode of that past wonderful life that looked now like fairy land. But a step was heard on the stair.

"Put it in your pocket," and Hannah thrust the peach under the table, in the child's hand, while the surreptitious custard was whisked out of sight.

"How slow you are with the dishes, Hannah! And do you mean to eat all night, Jane?"

"She hasn't eaten a bit," interrupted Hannah.

Certainly the Madam's kitchen tone was very different from her drawing-room tone.

"Get through with your meal as quickly as possible then, and go up-stairs. I am waiting to have the lamps lighted. And the gossiping of servants is a thing that I *will not* allow in my house, and you know it, Hannah. It is your place to set an example."

"I wasn't gossiping," returned Hannah, sulkily.

Titania gave her a grateful look, and went quietly out of the room. Mrs. Winstead seized the opportunity to im-

press upon Hannah the utter perverseness and intractability of Jane, and the trouble she was likely to have with her. "I should not wonder if I had to send her back," was her concluding verdict; but if she had known that it would prove a joy, and not a threat, to the child, she would hardly have uttered it.

Titania was so weary with conflicting emotions that hardly had her head touched the pillow before she fell asleep, and forgot her woes.

September came in, with no word from Kate. Mr. Archie went off to college with an indifferent good-by, and the house was the more endurable for his absence. Helena was cold and supercilious, but she had not, as yet, the petty cruelty of her mother.

Mrs. Winstead found that she was likely to have a treasure in her deft-handed maiden. She would not have admitted the fact; indeed, to her friends she bewailed the possession of that exceeding sympathy that was always leading her into such foolish experiments.

"It will take two or three years to train the child into anything," she would say, "and you can never predict how a girl of that class will turn out. There is so much in birth. But when the world is filled with these homeless creatures we must all do a little toward raising them; and, in any case, I will have tried to save one poor soul from destruction."

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE TRACK.

MEANWHILE what had befallen Mrs. Chippenham.

It must be admitted that Gilbert's usual luck followed him. He had never succeeded at anything, and never would. In poverty he lacked perseverance, and the resolute courage necessary to battle with adverse circumstances, and in prosperity his overweening vanity led him astray. His winter in Paris was not a success. He spent a great deal of money in preparing his play for the stage, and suffered the bitter mortification of having it hissed. Then he quarrelled with the manager, and found himself a general laughing-stock. The keen wit of the Parisians stung him through his self-complacency.

He had indulged in extravagant club-living and gaming, and found that here, too, the piper must be paid. So he took a sudden disgust to the dancing.

It was plain that they would be compelled to economize. Kate must give up her hotel and her ponies, and perhaps they had better quit Paris. He had not been appreciated as his talents deserved. The managers and the clubs were a gigantic swindle. There was Rome, and Florence, and Vienna, and the German baths. They had done none of them. If they re-commenced their tour he need not go into any awkward explanations with Kate.

His proposal to visit Italy was received with pleasure. Kate cheerfully disposed of the ponies, packed her trunks, and late in May they reached Florence. Here he met some old friends, needy adventurers, who welcomed him

warmly. He would devote himself to writing a book of travels that should distance everything.

Kate demurred somewhat at her accommodations.

"Everything is so fearfully expensive," said her lord and master! "and, Kate, we are not nabobs. We really spent more in Paris than we should have done."

"But I thought living in Paris was so cheap, much cheaper than in America. And yet it seems as if my dresses cost more, and you couldn't stir without spending a handful of francs."

"That was our bridal tour, and we won't begrudge the money," he replied, with a rather grandiose bearing. "In future we will try to be more economical."

He meant that she should be. He could see where to deprive her of some needless luxury, but for himself a certain style was necessary. She was not the kind of woman to advance a man in society, and then she was so much older. He began to think, in a patronizing way, that he had been exceedingly foolish to marry her, to tie himself to a vulgar, commonplace person.

And so poor Kate found it rather dull, alone among strangers, and poured out her heart again to Titania, in a letter the poor child never received.

"Gilbert," she said, a month or so later, "have you written to Mr. Thomas that Titania will not enter into any new engagement? I want her sent for, to come to us in the fall."

"Oh, of course, of course," was Gilbert's impatient reply, scarcely heeding what she said.

They went to Rome. Kate wandered about listlessly, and Gilbert did not find much to attract him; so, after a brief sojourn, they went to Germany. Homburg opened hospitable doors.

Mr. Chippenham began to be concerned about his remittance from Roberts, and wrote a sharp letter to the agent. Then he wondered if he could not manage to make Titania

more profitable. She was worth more than Thomas paid for her. A pretty little thing — perhaps he could create quite a sensation with her. Kate would make a fuss doubtless, but she would see that it was best.

Then came a letter that had followed him from point to point. It detailed Titania's mishap, and stated that Thomas had thrown up the engagement. Titania had been taken to a hospital — her back was so injured by the fall that the probabilities were she would never do for a stage performer. Mr. Roberts suggested that she should be sent to Mrs. Chippenham as soon as she was able to travel.

The innate selfishness of the man took alarm. Titania certainly had no legal claim upon Kate. If she were to be dependent — helpless — no, he could not think of having Kate bothered with her. It was another piece of bad luck, and he half believed the child had done it purposely. Let her suffer the consequences, then.

So he replied immediately. They could do nothing for her. Mrs. Chippenham was travelling about, and really had no home. If Titania was injured beyond recovery the best plan would be to send her to some charitable institution, or orphan asylum.

In reply Chippenham received word that this had been done.

Bitten by a mania for gambling, Chippenham was rapidly reducing Kate's once comfortable fortune. Moreover he was growing very morose, and Kate saw with dismay that much of the time he was under the influence of liquor. Remonstrating only drew upon her head a shower of abuse.

Six months had now elapsed without any direct tidings from Titania, so Kate applied to Mr. Roberts with the utmost urgency.

Poor Kate had sown to the wind, like a foolish woman, and was now to reap the whirlwind. She found her dear

Gilbert a harder master than Dick Bridger had ever been. Indeed, he ceased to keep up the formula of love that had so blinded her. She could get no satisfaction about business matters, and he doled her out her own money with grumbling and oaths. She began to fear she had been unwise in trusting him so implicitly.

Mr. Roberts' brief note amazed her. He stated that he had kept Mr. Chippenham informed of all that had befallen Mam'selle Barretti; but he went over the details for her satisfaction.

This sad news shocked first, then roused. She had fancied Titania well and happy, gaining triumphs and applause, growing more enchantingly beautiful, and enjoying the excitements of the stage, that would have been such a delight to her vain, foolish soul. But if Dick's little Queenie was injured, a cripple for life, her duty was clear. Have her she must. No Hospital or Home should befriend the child while she had a penny.

The womanly part of her soul was touched. The most unselfish love of Kate's whole life came to light now. She had always been interested in the small waif drifted to her keeping by the strange incidents of a peculiar fate. Shut out of other channels for affection this became more intense, and if it had not the noblest sentiment for a foundation its present kindly intention purified and ennobled.

Unluckily Gilbert Chippenham sauntered into his wife's room at this juncture. She turned upon him with the letter, and in a passion that surprised even herself. Had he known all this time? Had he dared to leave Titania among strangers,—an object of charity?

It led, as may be supposed, to a desperate quarrel. Chippenham refused to send for Titania, to return to America, or even give his wife a dollar to spend on the beggar's brat. She was nothing to them. Let her live or die as she liked. Kate must understand once for all that she should never be an inmate of *his* house!

"She shall be an inmate of mine, then," answered Kate, defiantly. "Either she shall come to me, or I will go to her."

Darling Gilbert swore furiously. And then he asked Kate, sneeringly, where she would get her money from? She could not touch a penny except as he gave it to her; and she had been so — extravagant! He would have no more such waste and foolery.

It was too true. Everything was in her husband's hands. That he had squandered nearly all of it never occurred to her. Her sanguine nature leaped over obstacles, and she made her plans directly.

She would send for Titania. There surely could be found some trusty person — captain of steamer, or stewardess, who, for proper compensation, would bring over the child. Then she would find a quiet, inexpensive home, or some simple school, perhaps, where she might be allowed to visit her frequently. But where was the money to come from?

There was but one way. Kate's whole soul was enlisted, her sluggish nature roused to a height of self-sacrifice. She took out her jewel-case, and selected the diamonds that had been such a source of gratification to her, and went straightway to a jeweller's. She so seldom wore them now that they would hardly be missed. And for the first time — remembering the freedom and delights of her brief widowhood — Kate Chippenham regretted her haste and her folly in espousing Gilbert. If she were only free to-day, and mistress of her own fortune! Into what monstrous madness had she been betrayed!

She realized quite a handsome sum, and immediately forwarded it to Mr. Roberts, with all possible and impossible instructions. Titania was to be sent at the earliest opportunity. Then she busied herself inquiring about schools, and planning the life together. Mr. Roberts had said that Titania was in no way crippled or deformed, as

he understood it, but left weak and ailing by the long sickness and possibly bad usage. She might get quite well and beautiful again; and a warm, motherly feeling sprang up in Kate's heart, the need of something to take Gilbert's place.

Kate did not really understand how gradual the process of disenchantment had been. Neglect, indifference, and tyranny had sapped her regard by slow degrees. It makes little difference what shock sends the fruit to the ground, when for weeks the worm has lain at its heart. She thought it his cruelty and deception about Titania, — she fancied she had forgiven his little daily sins. Like many another common-place, unreasoning woman, there was no long-suffering to her love. If she could have taken her money out of his hands she would have bidden him a joyful good-by. As it was, she resolved to set herself to manage against him, to outwit him, to master him by any strategy.

It was the middle of December before her letter reached Mr. Roberts, and it found him so engrossed with various matters that he merely deputed a subordinate to make inquiries, and answer the letter. Through a misunderstanding of names word was sent back that the child had died.

A little later another actor appeared on the scene. Was Dick's little Queen ever to know how warm an interest she created and kept alive in the hearts of strangers?

Roger Lasselle had found many interests for his young manhood. Ambition to keep somewhere near his cousin Lawrence in scholarship, friendship, — for he was of the kind who are always the centre of an admiring circle. He adored Aunt Alice with the passion of a boy who has never had mother or sister to love, and her influence over him was most refining, in his amusements as well as tastes.

He and Lawrence were to go home for the Christmas holidays. An evening or two before, he sat lounging and smoking in the room of a classmate, who was tumbling out

the contents of a trunk, and laughing at the carefulness with which various unimportant articles had been stored away, by an ever-watchful aunt, whose protegee he was.

"Women always put such a sight of useless, humbugging things among a fellow's traps," was his rather humorous comment. "These socks are wrapped in newspaper to keep out moths, and I told Aunt Lucy I should never wear them, — woollen, think of it!" — and he laughingly tore off the paper. "Hello! I wonder they were not demoralized! here's a flaming advertisement of a grand show!"

"Let's have it?" and Roger reached out his hand, lazily. "I remember when a circus used to set me wild, and some placard of a minstrel band posted on a dead wall stirred my young blood."

"Marvellous Fairy Queen Titania," read his friend.

Roger sprang up with an eager laugh.

"That's a century old, Ned! I went to it myself. Let's see how it looks."

"Why, were you ever in L—; at the Odeon?"

"No, it wasn't there. What are you talking about? But I am the dunce, I dare say. This was at Branchville, ages ago. Titania was a most beautiful little creature. When was she in L—?"

"Why, this has the date of last April."

"April? Then she has come back!"

"Did you know her?" was the wondering inquiry.

"Well, no," and Roger gave an odd little laugh. "It is a queer sort of complication. She resembled a picture of a lost child that my aunt was interested in, and I set out to find her," continued Roger, blushing boyishly. "The man who had her died, and the woman married and went to Europe, taking the child, I heard. And there I lost sight of them. She isn't the same child, of course," rather disconsolately.

"What do you want of her, then, if she hasn't the identical strawberry mark on her arm? — and then this

Odeon is not considered very first class, — and finally, what will you do with her?"

"Chaff away as much as you like, Ned, I was wonderfully taken with the little creature. Then the other story was so romantic. The child is daughter of a nobleman, and the nurse who was with her when she was lost lives with my aunt. There was no connecting link but this remarkable likeness, and as far as I could learn this Barretti was her father, though the woman was not her mother. Theatrical people have queer antecedents. But I'd give anything to find this Titania. I am glad your aunt was so careful of your socks, Ned. What if I should make you a flying visit?"

"Upon my word you are quite a hero of romance. Suppose you tell the story coherently, so that I can distinguish between the lady of high degree, and the wonderful acrobat, tight-rope dancer, &c."

Roger succeeded in interesting Ned Strathan almost as keenly as he had been interested, and they planned for a visit. Roger went to his room, in a brown study, with the bit of paper in his hand. How odd that this should crop out again! And yet it might be a different person. Titania was not an unusual stage cognomen. But he would hunt her up without saying a word to Lal or his aunt. If he could learn whether Barretti was really her father! And yet a child of seven would remember if she had been lost in the street. But such romances seldom happened out of books, he told himself, by way of moderating his ardor.

Still, he would so like to find Titania again, — and the vision of the beautiful child floated before his eyes, in all her grace and witchery. What gave him this intense, absurd longing for her?

They wondered at his aunt's why he should be so crazy as to set off on Monday for Ned Strathan's, when he had

only parted with him on Friday, and, moreover, was not acquainted with another member of the family.

"Why did you not ask him here?" said Aunt Alice.

"You boys might have had such a nice visit together."

"I'll invite him next vacation," returned Roger, laughingly.

A two-hours' journey brought him to L——. Ned met him at the station.

"Now here's the Odeon," explained Ned, walking up the street. "You see it is no great affair. I called here on Saturday, and found the manager. His name is King. This child was the one Signor Barretti had; but King said she was a puny little thing, not a bit handsome, and didn't do half the feats Thomas claimed that she could. She had a bad fall, and was taken to the hospital. King called Thomas a drunken swindler. Still I made an engagement," and Ned glanced furtively to see if his friend was disgusted.

"You were good to learn that much, Ned," was the cordial response. "Can we see this King soon?"

"Yes. I said my friend would be here at two. He promised to meet us at the theatre, if you don't mind going in such a hole! It is patronized chiefly by the roughs. We have a very pretty opera-house in town," he announced, with some pride.

"At which we will hear nothing of Titania," appended Roger, with a smile.

"Here is the private entrance. It is a horrid little hole," and the aristocratic Ned drew up his nose. "Through here to the green-room and private office."

Rose and Lily De Vere were starring it in fresh pastures, and with new lovers. Still there was no lack of remarkable attractions on the show-bills. The two young men picked their way through the dirty, ill-smelling passages, and reached the desired haven, perfumed with the odor of whiskey and tobacco. Mr. King had just stepped

out, but would be in presently. They sat down amidst the disorder, and waited until patience came nearly to an end.

He made his appearance at length, — a short, stout, red-faced man, with a brisk, almost rough business-air. Seeing the two young men he nodded, and said, "Oh!" with a kind of grunt.

Ned Strathan explained, and introduced his friend. The story was gone over again, interspersed with some oaths and forcible adjectives. For Mr. King considered that he had been grossly deceived by Thomas, and was not very complimentary to him or his little acrobat, to whom, indeed, he allowed very few charms.

"What has become of Thomas?" asked Roger.

"I don't know. He was a drunken scoundrel. He was paying a high price, too, for the girl; and had to make a profit on her. Poor stock, in my opinion. Might have been well enough once, but you see the business wears out children, and when they're gone, they're gone. A man wrote to me a few days ago about it — I dare say she's dead. He was the agent, I believe. The public in my line demand first-rate talent, no half-way work. Though if she hadn't been weakly she might have done; but they seldom get over anything in the back. No doubt she's as well off dead as alive, though you might learn more about her at the hospital. I don't trouble my head with people when I'm through with 'em," and King finished with a resolute nod.

Roger obtained the agent's address, and they bowed themselves out.

"What a vile hole! That destroys stage glamour effectually," said Ned.

"Now, can we go to the hospital?"

"There are two or three. Let me see; we can take a car right to St. James'. We'll try that.

It was the wrong one, of course. Yet a little girl had been injured by a fall and died there.

Then they found another. The child had been there. A little acrobat, named Titania Barretti, hurt by a fall, a delicate little thing, sick with a fever. There had been a good deal of interest about her, at first, but it died out, as such things are apt to do. She was finally taken to the "Home for the Friendless."

The short winter day had drawn to a close.

"We must go home now," announced Ned. "Aunt Lucy's tea is exactly at half-past five, and it will never do to be late."

"Where is this Home?" asked Roger.

"Out in the suburbs. Don't mind about it to-night. I've promised you to some friends of mine, a set of jolly, musical girls, where you always have the nicest of times. Then we will take a fresh start in the morning."

Roger found himself overruled. Indeed, the warmth and cosiness of Miss Strathan's parlor proved so enticing that he had a mind to give up the nice musical girls. Miss Strathan was nearing forty, but as little like the traditional old maid as possible. Then there was a grandmother, a lovely old lady; and Miss Katy, a second or third cousin, an invalid. An air of picturesque refinement pervaded the house, and Roger's artistic side was won immediately.

However, Ned persisted and carried him off. They slept late the next morning, although their night's dissipation had been a harmless one. Then they started out to discover what next had befallen the poor little acrobat.

Mrs. Post received them politely. She remembered the child well, and was quite enthusiastic about her sweetness and beauty. But she had been taken away, and the record was searched for particulars.

"A Mrs. Winstead, residence, Arlington, fifty or sixty miles from here, a most beautiful place, I have heard," explained Mrs. Post. "Through Mrs. Gaylord, one of the patronesses of the Institution. She is in Europe, or you

would be able to learn all the particulars. I might write and inquire?"

"You think the child is surely there?"

"Oh, certainly. If she had not suited she would have been returned. I thought her a very lovely little being, and have often longed to hear how she fared; but there are so many coming and going, that we cannot keep up with them all. The child had some friend or connection in Paris. She expected to hear from her, and I was to forward the letter, but it never came. You appear to be greatly interested in her?" and Mrs. Post studied him.

"I am," replied Roger. "It is important that I should find her."

"Are you a relative?" she ventured.

"No, but I may place her in communication with relatives," was the brief response.

"I should be so rejoiced. The child impressed me as being well born. If any good fortune happens to her will you let me know?"

"With pleasure," replied Roger, bowing his adieu.

"The old case of the needle in a hay-stack," laughed Ned. "What will you do next?"

"Go to Arlington. Find this Mrs. Winstead."

"Nonsense! You don't mean it!"

"But I do mean it," said Roger, firmly. "I am determined to find the child."

"And when found — marry her. Slightly altered from Captain Cuttle."

"Now it is you who talk nonsense," returned Roger, laughingly. "I fancy neither of us will be in great haste to rush into matrimony. And you forget that this little creature is a mere child. At present it will be more to the purpose to inquire about trains to Arlington."

"Old fellow, you are *not* going to day, that is settled. I will not be so out-rivalled by this pretty stage heroine. Come, you have only given me a bit of last evening. To-

morrow, if you *must*, you can take the train to Arlington, and then return direct to New York. The rest of to-day is mine."

Roger yielded to his friend, and, it must be confessed, enjoyed his visit. Yet he was glad to start the next morning, and found himself on the way to Arlington with so buoyant a feeling, that he took it as an omen of success. He could hardly hope that this fairy, Titania, would prove the lost child, yet his heart was set upon finding her. With the help of Aunt Alice he would rescue her from a hard, dangerous life, and place her in the position that her remarkable beauty demanded.

It was a bright, crisp, winter morning, with floods of brilliant sunshine. Beside him sat a plain, middle-aged woman, who nodded a drowsy accompaniment to the motion of the cars. He read his paper, noted the points of the wintry landscape, as they whirled by, counted the stations, and, after what appeared an interminable while, reached his destination.

He had never been in the town before, and was struck by its beauty, even at mid-winter. The long, straight streets, the spacious lawns and gardens, the diversity of architecture, the general air of home comfort and cheerfulness, pleased him greatly. He had no difficulty in finding the Winstead residence, and sent up his card.

"Mr. Roger Lasselle!" exclaimed Mrs. Winstead, studying the card in surprise. "Are you sure it is not for Miss Helena? You are so stupid, Hannah!"

"He asked for you, ma'am, Mrs. Winstead. He said he was a stranger, and wanted to see you on some business," was the concise reply.

"Oh, an agent, I dare say! No doubt you showed him in the drawing-room. You have no judgment!" and the mistress frowned angrily.

"He's young and handsome, and looked like a gentleman," pleaded Hannah, in extenuation.

Mrs. Winstead went down, presently. As Roger rose from his seat by the window, the lady suddenly smoothed her ruffled brow. A gentleman, truly. Hannah was not mistaken.

"I must beg you to pardon the intrusion of a stranger," Mr. Lasselle began, in his rich, musical voice. "If I am rightly informed, last July you took a little girl from the Home of the Friendless at L——. Is she still with you?"

The brow darkened again. The haughty, piercing eyes were fixed on the young man's face.

"Are you connected with that Institution?" was the authoritative query.

"I am not. My interest is in the child — to restore her to some friends."

"I am sorry I cannot give you a better account of her, then;" and the tone was compounded of a certain bitter joy and irony. "I am afraid any *friend* would feel rather disappointed in her."

Roger's heart gave a great, anxious bound.

"I was over-persuaded into trying her. It is a great risk to take a child from these public institutions, as they are the very dregs of humanity. I did it once before, and by the time I had the girl trained to be of some service she had grown so filled with a sense of her own importance that she was absolutely insufferable. But one cannot help experiencing a feeling of profound pity for these street waifs, and you are besieged on the right and left to help provide for them. I do consider it a great work of charity. Giving your money is a simple matter, compared with it," said the lady, impressively.

"And Titania," questioned Roger.

"They are all alike," and Mrs. Winstead waved her hand majestically. "Yet I was deceived in the child's looks. I fancied her a quiet, inoffensive little thing, not very bright, perhaps, but capable of being trained to do trifling errands, and to wait upon my daughter, who would

have, in time, been a most indulgent mistress, indeed a friend as well."

"You did not send her back," said Roger, rather tired of all this.

"I am coming to the sequel. I found her indolent, self-willed, sullen, and deceitful. Another person, no doubt, would have returned her immediately, but I thought some one must work to save these poor, miserable creatures, that are fast becoming a dangerous part of all our cities I worked faithfully with her, but all in vain."

Roger questioned with his eager eyes at this point. The would be impressiveness was tedious.

"If you are a true friend, and have her welfare at heart, you will be grieved to learn that she was utterly incapable of appreciating the care and kindness. Finding that it was quite impossible to do anything with her I did threaten to send her back, — when she went away."

"Oh, she is not gone?" cried Roger, springing up with an acute sense of disappointment. Was his search to fail, then, after all?

"She disappeared about a month ago. As she had no money, I suppose she must have taken some articles of value and disposed of them. In a house like this, where you generally have trusty servants, you are not apt to be so careful, and there are many trinkets lying around. I suppose it was my duty to search for her, and to have her punished, but I could not make up my mind to such a course."

"Then you have no clew; you know nothing of her?" the lad asked excitedly.

"I have no clew," waving her hand majestically. "That she left Arlington I am quite certain. She would not care to stay where there was a possibility of her detection."

Roger felt that this was so. He was bitterly disappointed. The story of Titania's delinquencies had some effect

upon him, though he felt that Mrs. Post was as likely to be right in her estimation as this exact moralist.

"You spoke of her friends? Where are they?"

Roger flushed with a touch of embarrassment. How much of Titania's history did this woman — ah, Roger, she could have annihilated you for the thought of such an appellation — know? Would she not have spoken derogatively of the stage episode? Perhaps she had not heard of it.

"A person adopted her, who is now abroad," began Roger, bunglingly.

"Oh, the woman cast her off, as I understood it. The child was most secretive about her past life, and I judged that there were some discreditable incidents in it. Does this person want her again?"

"I believe she does," said Roger, boldly.

"I can give you no help. The child had a great deal of vanity, and fancied herself pretty. For such homeless girls one can hardly hope for the best. She may have gone back to old associations."

"I am sorry to have given you so much trouble," said Roger, rising. "You are quite certain she is not in Arlington."

"Oh, quite. You see Arlington is an exceedingly aristocratic town. Hardly another house would be open to a foundling on any terms."

"I am very sorry to have missed her. Thanks for your courtesy;" and Roger took a few steps toward the door. He hated to give up the search, but the clew certainly was lost here.

Mrs. Winstead bowed politely. The indescribable air of breeding and authority kept her in check until she had gone up-stairs.

"I must say it is singular, Helena," she commented, after she had related the rencounter. "A very handsome young man making minute inquiries about such a thing as

that miserable little Jane. It may be all right enough. I should hate to misjudge any one, but it has a look I do not like. I should not have given her up to him without some better security than his own word. I felt really glad that she had taken herself off, and that no further complications could arise. I could never have made anything of the girl. Roger Lasselle! It is a stylish name, certainly. There is Lasselle the great banker, — but it seems as if I had known some one of the name;” and the lady knit her brows.

Roger reached New York tired and cross. He was more disappointed than he cared to own. He talked of his visit, but keen-eyed Aunt Alice fancied it had not been a success.

The next day he hunted up Mr. Roberts and puzzled that gentleman greatly, who now admitted that Mrs. Chippenham had sent for the child, and some way they had heard she was dead.

“And can nothing be done?” asked Roger impatiently. It was exasperating to be foiled just here.

“I don’t know of anything but to advertise,” was the answer.

“Then let us advertise, by all means.”

CHAPTER XX.

MISS MADEIRA.

It was true that just a narrow chance had again intervened between Titania and a future fairer than any of her dreams. This time she had chosen the part of a waif and stray, with almost pathetic deliberation.

Week after week she had waited to hear from Kate, — waited in such feverish anxiety that her very life became centred in the thought. Sleeping and waking it haunted her. Sweet dreams visited her nightly, only to make the days a more bitter and miserable reality. Indeed, it seemed at times as if the rule of Owen Thomas was preferable to that of her hard task-mistress.

Mrs. Winstead acknowledged in her secret soul that the child would make a very useful domestic if properly trained. It would of course be the salvation of both soul and body not only to keep her in ignorance of any charms she might possess, but to despoil her of them as far as possible. Her few garments were made in the most unbecoming manner, and every point about her that could be criticised or ridiculed was treated to a liberal allowance in the most unsparing fashion, until Titania became almost an object of aversion to herself.

Three months had gone by without a word. Was she to remain here in this slavery for years? Better go back to the stage that she so hated. Indeed, she felt that she had recovered from the effects of both fall and illness. Some one would take her in surely. She could dance, if nothing else.

The thought roused her to new life. But how was she

to go? She had not a penny, and there was no one whom she dared ask, — not even Hannah, who had come to sympathize with her in various ways. If she could get to New York again, — but it was a long way, and, as she soon found, would cost a great deal.

She smiled with a sense of dreary humor as she recalled how she had once run away from Dick Bridger. Poor, dear Dick! and a tear fell to the memory of that dead and gone love.

Day after day she thought it over, resolving at last that all she could do would be to walk to the next village, some four miles distant, and then trust — to what? God? She knew so little about Him now. These four years of heathenism had well-nigh blotted out the baby faith of mother-lips. A great intangible something seemed to win her to repose in its shadowy arms.

Simple and ignorant as she was in some matters, in others she had garnered much bitter and worldly-wise experience. And something — was it the blood of her race? — rebelled continually against this menial existence. In the other life there had been hours of triumph, shallow and common, perhaps, but still triumph.

One bright November morning, when days of storm had cleared the air, Mrs. Winstead arrayed herself in an ample costume of silk and velvet, and stepped into her carriage. Titania sat by the window with piles of work before her. She had become quite a neat and expeditious seamstress already. As the wheels crunched over the frozen ground her heart gave a great leap. She sprang up and took two or three whirls about the room as if it had been a stage. Up-stairs she sped, and choosing the best of her attire made herself as respectable as possible. Her hat she had trimmed with some bits of blue silk thrown in the waste-bag, and fortunately a good thick shawl had been added to her scanty wardrobe. When her attire was complete, she crept down the stairs, through the

great hall, and out at the front door; as Sam, being busy at the rear of the house, would not see her, and so could not question her. Down the avenue, like a little brown hare, she fled, but instead of taking the main street turned into one less aristocratic, and made her way toward the station. If she followed the track she could not go far astray.

How delightful the sunshine and the crisp air felt to her cheek! A buoyant, exultant sense of freedom thrilled every pulse. She did not mind the hard, frozen ground, though it made rough walking, so that she sped along unnoticed, and there were not many familiar eyes to pounce down upon her.

She had been a prisoner so long. She ran, and skipped, and could have danced for joy, as she shook off the chains and claims of the slavish life. Now and then a train whizzed by, but she hardly envied it.

The small village came in sight almost before she thought. She went a little more slowly. There was a pretty station, with a great dog basking in the sunshine and two or three men lounging about. One of them stared at her — then he took a step forward.

"Hillo! youngster," he shouted, "keep away from that track. Train 'll be down in five minutes."

That was all. She drew a long breath and went on, but the exhilaration of the atmosphere and her journey were somewhat dying out. She was a little tired and hungry, yet she might as well go forward. This place savored too much of Arlington, with its pretty houses and capacious grounds, its broad avenues and air of quiet.

Presently the sun went under a cloud, and the wind blew up rather chilly. Her steps began to lag. What should she do? She had no money for a bit of bread, even, and she must stay somewhere. Surely she could not walk all night.

She was coming in sight of another little town. It was quite duskish now. Bells were ringing and steam-whistles

uttering shrill shrieks. The streets and lanes began to fill with people going home from work. She looked at the dinner baskets and kettles with a strange longing, for now she was very hungry, and very tired, and shivering with the cold. These people were all going home, and she —

Titania entered the railroad station and sat down by the stove. Oh, how delightful it felt. If she could only stay here all night, she would not mind being hungry. People came and went, and no one remarked her, and by-and-by, overcome by fatigue and the pleasurable warmth, she fell asleep.

She was roused from her nap — it hardly seemed ten minutes to her, but it had in reality been over two hours — by a rough grasp on her shoulder, that she thought at the first instant was Mrs. Winstead. Instead it was a rather small man, with keen, deep-set eyes, and an enormous, bushy beard. Titania sprang up in affright.

"What are you doing here?" he asked sharply. "Have you missed your train? Where are you going?"

"Going?" and she stared helplessly.

"Yes, going! For you can't stay here all night. There's just one more train down, the nine-thirty," and he studied her as if deciding what she might be, rather inclining to the belief that she was a sharp little vagrant.

"Do you want to take the train?"

"No," was her faltering answer.

"Then get out of this."

She rose without a word, and walked away quietly. It was very, very dark, and there was a cold, drizzling rain. She shivered and cast a regretful glance behind her. Could she beg for a night's shelter.

She turned up a dimly lighted street. Bartlett was always quiet at this time in the evening, but in a rain, and to a little waif, startlingly dreary. She went straight on until she heard some steps in the distance, then she turned down a side street that was still dimmer and more quiet, if such

a thing was possible. Indeed, an almost ghostly stillness reigned. She had never been a very brave child, and now the prospect of spending a night in the streets terrified her beyond measure. And what was she to do to-morrow?

And all the rest of the to-morrows that rose up in such a dreary array before her! How could she get to the city without starving by the way — or begging — yes, it must come to that. To-morrow she would ask some one for a little breakfast.

It began to rain harder. She must find some shelter. She peered eagerly at the houses where there were lights in the windows. Were there any little girls within, warm and happy, with fathers and mothers to love and care for them? Oh, how fortunate they were! And now she could not help crying over her own sad, lonely fate.

By the light of one window she saw the covered porch of the house next door. It was only a box, but it seemed to promise shelter. She opened the gate softly, walked up the short path, and crept in. There was no light anywhere, and she did not dare knock at the door. It seemed warm by contrast, so she felt around and huddled herself in the farthest corner, drawing the driest part of the shawl over her head. Her feet were wet, cold, and muddy, so she took off her shoes and drew the chilly little feet under her skirts, where they soon became comfortable. Sheltered from the wind and rain she said a little prayer and shut her eyes, when fatigue and drowsiness mercifully interposed.

It was a light, uneasy slumber, yet it took her out of herself and the day's perplexities. Once or twice a noise aroused her; indeed, once the barking of a dog so terrified her that she could not repress a scream. And presently the gray light of morning began to dawn. It was cold and cloudy, but it no longer rained. Footsteps began to sound in the streets.

Titania roused herself a little. She felt stiff and cramped, and shivered as if with an ague. Her shoes were like bits of horn, and still wet inside. In spite of her effort at courage the slow tears filled her eyes.

The door opened suddenly, and a woman stood there with a broom in her hand.

"Oh, get out! Get away you great shaggy brute! You've gone and muddied up my porch, and I'm alwers afeared of dogs. Oh, goodness, gracious me! And it isn't a dog at all! Why, where *did* you come from? And you haven't slept there all night; and bless my soul, it's a little girl!"

"Oh, don't drive me away!" almost shrieked Titania. "I did sleep here all night. I had no place to go, and it rained so hard."

The woman still stared at her, with the upraised broom in her hand. She was very tall and very thin, and, what with her scant skirts and her long arms, her long thin neck and her long-featured face, she looked as if she had gone through some peculiar process of being drawn out to the very farthest extent. Then her forehead was very high, and her pale sandy hair was drawn up to the top in a knot, and fastened with a bit of silver comb.

"Where did you come from?" she asked, at length, letting the broom drop at her side. "Or do you belong to a gang that I've heerd tell off, cause I haven't anything worth stealing, as I may as well tell you first as last. I'm a lone, lorn woman, and go out dress-making at six shillings a day. But goodness gracious me! Do come in and get warm. I'm afeared of dogs, as I told you, but I'd be sorry to see one freeze or starve on my hands. Is them your shoes?"

"Yes," replied Titania, half smiling at the grotesque harangue. "They were so wet last night."

"And you staid here all night, out in the cold, as if 'twas a heathen world, and no shelter for a human being.

I'm poor enough, but I've always had a bed, a good feather bed, too, — my great aunt gave it to me for my name, — and you curled up here just as a dog would, and slept. And where's your mother?"

"My own mamma died when I was ever so little;" and Titania rose out of her lair.

"And you've slept all night in them damp clothes; it's enough to give you your death of danger. Come in. You're sure you don't belong to any gang?"

Titania underwent another sharp scrutiny.

"I don't belong to anybody. I'll tell you all about it if you will let me. And I will work for you. I can sew quite well," the child cried, eagerly, her pale little face lightened by a sudden glow of hope.

Titania picked up her shoes and stepped inside. Her hostess set down the broom, bolted the door, led the way through a tiny narrow hall that seemed to finish with a door on one side and a stairway at the end.

"Come right into the kitchen, it's good and warm. Kettle's bilin' a'ready. I do say for it, there's nothing so cheerful as a kettle bilin'. I read a story about it once, though I'm a church-member, and don't believe in stories that are vain and trifling, when you must give an account at the last day. But I couldn't help liking it, though Miss Burgess has a whole library full, and that among 'em, and a better Christian woman I never see. There, sit down right here by the stove, — and to think you slept out of doors in the cold all night. There, don't cry. You don't look as if you'd been among bad people, though there was Alec Simpson in the bank, — and a powerful exhorter, and a master hand at making a prayer; why, folks said he ought'er be a minister, and I'm sure I thought so too, for he was the very salt of the earth, — and he went off with heaps and heaps of money. But you can't most always tell, and looks are sometimes deceiving. Oh, don't cry!"

The warmth and cosiness had so stirred the child's heart

that the tense nerves relaxed suddenly, and her sobbing was fairly hysterical. The woman looked at her in dismay.

"Oh, don't mind me," was the broken exclamation. "It's all so nice, and I'm so tired, and I didn't have anything to eat after breakfast yesterday, and sleeping in the cold —."

"There, don't cry so, you poor dear. And your clothes are all damp, too, and whatever shall I do, for my gowns are too big, and my petticoats would be miles too long, you're such a mite of a thing. Were you bad treated? There, you best to have some lavender, red lavender, I alwers take it when I'm beat out and nervous. And I have a sack that is nice and warm, and it'll come most down to your feet, and some woollen stockings that I've knit for my sister's little boy."

The good woman bustled about, hunting up the garments, while Titania made a great effort to check the sobbing, and the quaint room partly diverted her attention. There was a thick, soft, rag-carpet on the floor, some very old-fashioned splint-seat chairs, with patchwork cushions, a round table in one corner surmounted by a great work basket, and another that served for dining purposes. There were some pictures hung way up to the ceiling, and a pair of fancy painted bellows one side of the chimney, while on the other hung a stack of holders, in a variety of colors. On the mantelpiece was nearly every variety of ornament, and a corner cupboard had glass doors, through which shone pewter platters, scoured to the brightness of silver, and antique dark-blue ware.

"Now you just try to get into these," said the rather thin, but kindly voice at her elbow, which made Titania start, "and then yours can dry. Happens so lucky I'm not going out to-day. You see Mrs. Stent had word yest'day that her mother was took with a stroke, and if the worst comes they'll want mournin', and, says she, 'Miss Maderia, 'tain't no use goin' on till I get back and

know a little how things are going to turn.' And now you just take off your dress; why, you're nice an' tidy like, and I can't understand how you come to sleep in the streets all night! There, you look something like a cat in a pillow-slip, but there'll be plenty of room to turn, and massy me! what bits of feet!" glancing at them in amazement.

"Oh, you are so good!" and Titania caught the bony hand in her soft, plump little palms, and covered it with kisses.

Miss Madeira looked bewildered.

"I will tell you how it all was," Titania began, eagerly. "I am not a — anything that is bad; but I ran away from a woman who had no right to keep me, and who was very cruel. She cut off all my beautiful hair. And if you will only give me something to eat — and I want to go to New York."

"Why, you're all of a tremble, as if you had an ague; and I don't wonder, sleeping out on that porch all night! Why didn't you knock? I'm a bit timid, living alone; and one hears so many things, and I bolt the doors, and I have tight shutters on the lower floor, with real old-fashioned bolts too, and I do say for it that I'm safe, with God a-watchin' over me; because, you know, David said if He didn't keep the city, the watchmen would wake in vain; though 'pears to me 'twould a been better to have had 'em awake all the time as they do now; but then the Jews had their way of doing things, and we have ours in the light of Gospel times. But I was going to give you some red lavender. There ain't nothing like it, when you are all tired out, and overwrought and stirred up generally. Here, now — and it don't taste bad at all. If you don't get an awful cold you'll be very lucky."

Titania swallowed the lavender. Then Miss Madeira put her in the Boston rocker, and placing a block of hard wood in the oven, bade her put her feet on that and get warm through and through. She looked at her cakes,

afterwards, put on the griddle, and began to arrange the table.

Titania shut her eyes, too happy and comfortable to stir. How good this queer, tall, thin Miss Madeira was! And what a funny name!

"I alwers drink tea," announced that lady, so suddenly that Titania almost sprang out of her chair. "May be you don't like it as well if you've been used to coffee; but my father didn't use to let us girls have either. He said it spoiled the complexion. And do you eat buckwheats?"

"I like — everything," said Titania. "And you are so good!" With that she gave Miss Madeira a sleepily grateful look, tintured with a weak smile.

"Then I'll begin to bake, for I have a bit of cold meat, and some nice head-cheese that I made myself. And if I do say it, — self-praise being no recommendation, — I make as good griddle-cakes as anybody. I alwers take my breakfast at home; for where people trust to an Irish girl buckwheats are never fit to eat. If there's anything I do abominate, it's heavy, soggy, sour griddle-cakes. There, now, isn't that like a puff? and browned to a turn. Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well, my old grandmother used to say."

Miss Madeira's face beamed with heat and pleasure, and Titania could not help smiling. She was drawn to her by some potent, unseen influence, just as she had once been drawn to Dolly St. John. Yet how different the two women were!

"Now, just sit by. Cakes are nothing if you can't have 'em hot. Piling a great stack on a platter spoils 'em, takes off the crispy edges and the puffiness; and when a thing is at its best then is the time to eat it. I remember how my old grandmother used to put away cake and preserves, and they a-getting spoiled and mouldy, and next summer no one caring for them with plenty of fresh things to eat. Right here, dear. I alwers sit there; and I've

lived alone by myself twelve years next Candlemas-day."

Titania took the seat assigned her. How fragrant the cakes were to the hungry child! and the slices of cold beef proved deliciously appetizing. It seemed as if she should never be able to eat enough; and would not good Miss Madeira feel disgusted with her? Had she absolutely fallen into fairy-land?

"I knew you'd like 'em!" exclaimed Miss Madeira, triumphantly. "And now, when you've eaten nothing since yesterday morning, you must make a good breakfast, and then you shall tell me all about it. I do believe you tell the truth."

"Oh, Miss Madeira, I couldn't tell you a lie when you have been so good!" and the soft, dark eyes filled with tears.

"But, you see, it's so strange that a little girl like you, and pretty, too, — though the pomps and vanities of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, — though what that has to do with it I don't just see, but beauty is vain and a fair woman is deceitful, — I believe that's somewhere in Proverbs, — and dark women are as likely to be deceitful, because, you see, Solomon knew most about the Egyptians, and they're all dark, and Jewesses that I ever saw; and isn't that cake just a picter, now?" pausing, with the uplifted knife in her hand with which she had just been turning it. "I declare, it does me good to see you eat! It happened so lucky that I wasn't going out to-day; for it's a longish walk to Mrs. Stent's, and car-fares six cents now where they were five before; and two cents a day — twice six — twelve cents a week, my dear!" triumphantly, as if she had been working out a problem in algebra.

Then she sat down and ate two cakes, but started up in dismay, her eyes fairly wild with surprise.

"Why, you ain't a-drawing back a'ready!" she exclaimed. "There's enough for another griddle full. I

mixed by pure accident last night, pouring in water twice, and never knowing there was a Providence, and you a-sleeping out on that porch all night, and being sent to my very door, like angels, unaware. But you must eat another cake ; or would you like a bit of bread ? ”

“ Oh, Miss Madeira, it is all so nice, and I have had a feast ! I am so thankful ! But I couldn’t eat another mouthful. And it is just like a fairy-story, and you are better even than Cinderella’s godmother. If you’ll let me, I will tell you every bit of my story, though Mrs. Post said — ” and Titania’s face flushed a delicate scarlet.

“ You’ve belonged to nice folks, I can see that ; but if your mother’s dead, and you a-being tossed about the world and treated badly, — and may be I’d run away myself. I used to think about it sometimes when I was a little girl. My father was one of the old-fashioned kind, powerful strict to a bow or a posy-bunch on your hat, and homespun gray in your dresses when other girls had blue and red ; but it was right that I should a-been delivered from the pomps and vanities of the world in my youth ; though ’pears to me dress-making is just a way of pomping to other people, and bringing in vanities with ruffles and overskirts, and sometimes I wonder if ’tis right. Then Miss Burgess says, ‘ Now, Miss Madeira,’ says she, ‘ don’t you take the burthen of other people on your soul. Let ’em answer for their own ruffles ; ’ — not as I do very much of that ; mine is the old-fashioned kind, when they called it manter-making. Won’t you even have another cup of tea ? ”

“ No, thank you. It has been a splendid feast,” and the beautiful dark eyes glowed with gratitude. “ And now if you would let me help wash up the cups and plates ? I used to wash all the dessert dishes and silver at — ” but she paused, lest the name might lead to detection. Yet surely Miss Madeira would not send her back ! Her heart warmed to the plain, quaint spinster, and for a moment a

vision of living with her filled Titania's heart with a thrill of joy.

"No, dear, you just go back to that rocking-chair, and rest. My! but you do look like a rose now that you're warmed up a little. I declare for it you are a picter, and it makes me a' most sorry that beauty is vain when it's so pretty to look at. And the Lord made it, too, and I could never get it quite straight in my mind why it was sinful."

"Oh, I think I know, Miss Madeira," cried the child. "It is because other people make you do things, and if you were ugly there wouldn't such crowds come to look at you. But then you don't make yourself pretty, and oh, do you suppose God has anything to do with it?"

"My dear, I hope you ain't an infidel, and so young, too!" said Miss Madeira, aghast.

"Will you please let me tell you what I have been? Mrs. Post said I had better not; but I want you to know, you are so good;" and Titania looked up wistfully.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOME AND LOVE.

"Yes, my dear, you shall tell me. I hope it isn't anything wrong," said Miss Madeira, with real solicitude, "for you see I've taken a liking to you already, and me a poor, lorn, lone woman, without a chick or a child; though why chickens should be reckoned a comfort I never could understand, — alwers a-getting in your neighbor's garden, and they a-quarrelling about 'em. Now you just sit there and rock, for rocking is very comforting, I've found, when I had heaps of worries, and you've no call to tell what isn't true on a full stomach."

"I never did tell a lie, dear Miss Madeira. Dick Bridger used to say so," and Titania raised her head in the pride of innocence.

"Begin way back at the beginning, when your mar died. And where is your par?"

"I don't know about him. He went away when I was very little. And then mamma died, and went to heaven, and Maggie, that was mamma's maid, came to New York, to find papa. She wanted to be my mamma then," and Titania sighed.

"And you didn't like her for a stepmother," cried Miss Madeira. "What made your father marry her?"

"But we never found papa. And then I was lost. There was a great street full of wagons and people."

"You don't mean it! And you haven't been wandering about ever since!" interrupted her listener. For Miss Madeira, in her amazement, let fall her dishcloth, and stared helplessly.

Titania went on with her story, rendered fragmentary by the running comments of Miss Madeira, in which seemed expressed every phase of feeling, but astonishment predominated. Tim Chafney, Mother Mell, the man in the dark little place that she was quite sure was a prison, and then Dick Bridger. She remembered it all so minutely, poor child. Indeed, there were hours and scenes stamped indelibly upon her soul that she could never forget to her dying day. But with the chivalrous tenderness of her nature toward a friend she had loved so dearly as her hero, Dick, she said nothing about the hardships of her training.

"Trapeze!" ejaculated Miss Madeira. "There's something I've heard the boys sing in the street — not that I pay much attention to vain and idle words — about a flying-trapeze, and I always thought it was some kind of a bat or a sea-serpent; but they don't make 'em out of little children, do they? Well, I'm clear beat," and she sat down, polishing the kettle lid vigorously with her apron, and never noticing the blunder. "You see my sister she married a sea-captain, and I've heerd him tell stories about the sea-serpent, though why folks go to look at 'em — and now see that right on my apron, clean yesterday?"

"Oh, Miss Madeira, it has nothing to do with that," and Titania could not forbear smiling. "It means wonderful and daring feats upon the stage of a theatre, and then there is tight-rope dancing, and dancing on a great high pedestal, and flying leaps, and all that. Everybody applauds so!"

"You don't mean that you've been on a stage at a theatre, and all dressed in tights, a little girl like you!"

"Oh, Miss Madeira, how could I help it!" she cried, imploringly. "He trained me just for that. Ah! you don't know. I might have been starved, and beaten, and turned out of doors. And Dick loved me so! He used to carry me in his arms, and keep me nice and warm, and read to me when I couldn't sleep, and was so good. Oh,

dear, dear Dick, if you only could come back again!" and the lustrous eyes swam in tears. "Miss Madeira, I said I wouldn't tell a lie. Mrs. Post told me that I had better not say anything about it, that everybody would think it dreadful, and not want me in their houses; but it was ever so much better than living with Mrs. Winstead."

"And you've danced on the stage!"

Miss Madeira rose up stiffly, and, then fell down, for no other term could be applied to the motion with which she sank into her chair, limp as if her bones had suddenly been transformed into cartilage, and her garments into a wet towel.

"Oh, dear Miss Madeira!" — and now Titania knelt at her feet, laying her sunny head in the other's lap, and kissing the bony hands, — "Oh, dear Miss Madeira, don't think it made me bad, and don't turn me away. I couldn't help it. Dick Bridger was a great man, and I was afraid of him at first. I had to do it. But oh, I don't want to ever again, if any one will only let me work. Only Mrs. Winstead was so hard, and I didn't always have enough to eat."

Miss Madeira looked into the sweet, shining eyes, so proudly clear and honest, and at the scarlet lips, so entreating in their wonderful beauty. The cheek against her hand was like a rose-leaf, the golden hair clustering in infantile rings across the pure white forehead reminded her of some picture of an angel. Could so sweet and fair a thing have grown foul in that pestilential atmosphere? The traditions of her class were strong upon Miss Madeira, who had never been out of a simple little country town in her life, and yet there was something deep in her soul stronger still, a faith in the simplicity of childhood, a trust in the fair young face before her.

"Well, I'm sure I don't know, and you look like an angel, and you couldn't lead me astray, I don't suppose, there being no theatre in Bartlett, but only now and then minstrels in Copp's Hall, and a circus on the green —"

"Oh, did you ever go to a circus?" cried Titania, her eyes sparkling.

"Never but once, my dear," and Miss Madeira blushed up to the roots of her sparse sandy hair. "It was when Captain Mullins was keeping company with my sister, and the wedding-day and all set, and fruit cake made, father being dead then five year or more, or I suppose 'Mimy wouldn't have durst to, and hardly to get married, father was that strict, an' alwers thinking we were little girls. Well, there came a circus to town, and everybody was going, though the next Sunday Elder Bond preached a powerful sermon; but gracious me, folks had been and the money was spent, and it was like locking the stable door when the colt's been stolen. I dare say he would have preached it before, only he didn't know anything about it; and Jemima, she was that hot foot to go, and to have me — she was ten year younger than me, there being some children lost between, boys; but may be they mightn't a-turned out well if they had lived, you can't most always tell, and Captain Mullins wouldn't hear of nothing to the contrary, and so we went."

"And was there any little girl who went flying through hoops, and stood on a man's shoulder or his hand, or balanced herself with a pole, or performed wonderful feats?" asked Titania, breathlessly.

"Yes, there was. She rode, too, and it seemed as if she would break her neck. And yes, she danced on a rope, and I made just sure she would fall; and how can they stick on so?"

"I wasn't trained to ride, but I did all the rest, and a great flying leap that people crowded to see. I used to hold my breath at first, for it seemed as if I must be dashed to pieces. And you didn't quite hate that little girl?"

"Hate her? Why, no, my dear."

"Then don't hate me. Let me tell you all the rest, and

how hard it was, for no one ever took care of me again like my dear Dick."

"If you don't mind I will get some sewing, as the dishes are washed, and I won't sweep up just now; but I wasn't brought up to idle away my time, and when I was ten year old I had five patchwork quilts pieced; but gracious me, I've never needed 'em, and shall leave 'em all to 'Mimy's children, — two little girls she's got, and two boys, — and when I was only four, mother used to make me say the Busy Bee —

' And Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do.'

But they ain't brought up that way nowadays, and nobody knits stockings or does fine darning. Patching's spoiled it all, and sewing-machines have just ruined women's nice work, and I wouldn't take one of the nasty, noisy, puckering things that can't sew a smooth seam, and use a sight of cotton, with long ends going to waste. There, my dear, I've kinder set up the idea of your being on the stage before me, and it don't seem so overwhelming like as it did at first; and now you'll go on about your Dick, as you call him, though children in my day alwers said mister, except Quakers, who alwers call first names."

Titania took up the thread of her story again. The journeys and triumphs with Dick, his accident and death, over which the soft voice trembled and the tender eyes were tearful; the hotel life, Kate's marriage, and her transfer to Owen Thomas.

"And she could go off and leave you after loving you like a child!" interrupted Miss Madeira indignantly. "And I don't believe that chap cared half as much for her as he did for the money, for men are deceitful creatures, and smooth-spoken, and ready to take everything. But 'twould serve her just right."

The hardships of the life that followed brought the honest tears to Miss Madeira's eyes. They ran down her long

nose, and she sniffed a little, and coughed, and rubbed her spectacles, but finally gave way to a good hearty cry, dropping her work, and clasping Titania in her arms.

"You poor lamb!" she exclaimed. "What a mercy your back wasn't broke and a hump growing out of your shoulders; and that man ought to be sent to prison for cruelty, and a book wrote about him. And his own poor little boy a cripple from misconduct and temper; and St. Paul was about right when he said, them as staid single did better. Marriage is a great risk, and even poor 'Mimy, whose husband wouldn't lift a finger to her, but he being away so much of the time, and she having babies to take care of all the time, and I do believe I'm better off without a chick or a child; but you can't most always tell. And there you was all alone in a hospital, a poor little mite that should have had a mar a-taking care of you. And what then? I declare it's just like a story, and you won't think me foolish for crying? I always cry over Joseph and his brethren, to this day."

Foolish! Why, it seemed to Titania as if she could just adore Miss Madeira with her queer, jumbled-together sentences, and her stiff, angular figure that held so merciful and kindly a soul.

There was not much more until she came to Mrs. Winstead. She had gone briefly over it all; the stern self-repression in which she had held herself the last two years was not conducive of garrulity. The smaller trials and sufferings she scarcely touched upon. She felt very bitter and indignant against Mrs. Winstead; indeed, it seemed as if she could forgive the cruelty and neglect of Owen Thomas more easily.

"And you don't mean that you was took to Arlington?" began Miss Madeira in surprise. "Away off there from New York!"

"But you will not send me back?" cried Titania. "She has no right to me. And she said every day that I was

not worth the food and clothes ; but I worked all the time indeed, and ripped and sewed, and scarcely spent an idle moment. Oh, Miss Madeira, if you will let me work for you until I can hear from Kate, I will do anything. You are so kind, so sweet."

So sweet! It touched a heart that had never known love to any extent. Miss Madeira's parents had been of the old-fashioned type, hard, stern, cold. Girlhood and womanhood had wasted away, with no taste of that deep, exquisite enjoyment that has the subtle flavor of youth and love. She had sorrowed decorously for her father, and perhaps with a touch more of pity for her mother. Jemima had gone to a cousin's, and there met her sea-captain who made short wooing, and took her on a wedding trip to Brazil, and from thence back to Maine, where she had remained until about three years ago, when she had come to New York. Once she had made a visit at her sister's, but Miss Madeira never had found the courage to return it. She always meant to, but it looked such a great undertaking. The sisters had drifted far apart, and the more sprightly, consequential Mrs. Mullins felt secretly ashamed of her plain, old-fashioned relative.

She had her friends, Miss Madeira, but no one came very near. She went to church ; she was asked out to tea now and then ; and she 'sewed round,' doing the plainer parts of dress-making, altering and turning old gowns for seventy-five cents a day, when stylish dressmakers had two dollars. She owned her little cottage of four rooms: the paternal Madeira had not accumulated much of this world's goods for fear of damaging his chances of heaven.

Miss Madeira had never known anything so simply, purely sweet as the trust of this small waif. Children in general were rather afraid of her. No little fingers had been brave enough to pull open the rough burr and disclose the inner sweetness. She sat now amazed and ashamed, like a young girl with her first lover, every pulse

of her being thrilled through with the strange, new experience. In all her life no one had ever said, "You are so sweet."

"My dear!"

Miss Madeira's voice trembled, and her thin lips quivered; then she clasped the child to her heart, both crying together.

"You shall stay if you want to," she managed to make answer presently. "It's a little cubby, but it's big enough to take you in. And to think of your walking all day without a mouthful, and sleeping out in the cold all night. It's a wonder you are not down sick. And I think you had a deal of courage to run away without a cent, and not knowing where to go, and New York so far off. But if you couldn't find Kate you'd have to dance and jig around again, and there's Herodias' daughter who danced off the head of John the Baptist, just as much as if her feet had been on his neck. I can't believe it's right after all, and may be that Mr. Chicken — what did you say his name was?"

"Chippenham."

"Ham. Well, there; I knew it was something to eat. May-be he will hire you out again; and I dare say he'll spend every penny she has, and treat her badly and, may-be go off and leave her; and then what could you do? For you know David says 'Put not your trust in princes, nor in any child of man;' not that we've any princes in this country, but the Jews had, and David knew all about 'em. And you shall just stay here and write to her, and it'll all come right somehow. I've faith to believe that. But you never heard anything of the girl your own mar had?"

"Maggie? No. Kate used to think she had lost me on purpose. I don't know;" and there came a dreamy, far-off look in the child's eyes.

"What is your other name?" asked Miss Madeira.

"The name mamma used to call me?" Nora. But Kate didn't like it. She said it sounded Irish."

"No, I meant your father's name."

"I don't know. I have forgotten. It was a hard name, and I did remember it at first, but it has quite gone out of my mind. And so many other things. I was so little then, you know;" and Queenie gave a womanly sigh.

"And you haven't any pictures or trinkets?"

"No. That ugly Mother Mell took the chain I wore around my neck. You don't think I could find Maggie again, do you?" and the eyes were alight with eager wistfulness.

"I suppose not, child. May-be — well, it's all in the hands of Providence, my dear, and the two sparrows sold for a farthing, with all the hairs of our head numbered; though it must be a sight of trouble when it keeps coming out every day. Now you wouldn't believe that when I was young I had a nice, thick head of hair, which Saint Paul says is a woman's glory, and he being a bachelor, though I don't know what he'd say now with women preaching in our churches, and going in business, and all that; but when they've families to support, as so many of 'em have, with husbands drunk so much of the time that wives could never ask 'em a question at home, for they wouldn't be sober enough to answer it, or only by smashing all the dishes; and though I believe in Saint Paul and do think he was the salt of the earth, it is my opinion the men of his time were different, or he wouldn't have advised wives to ask 'em questions;" and Miss Maderia paused, quite out of breath, then suddenly caught herself up, with the abrupt question, "What did she do with it?"

"The chain?" asked Titania, a little bewildered by the rapid, inconsequent monologue.

"Oh, no, your hair. You said she cut it off."

"Yes. Mrs. Winstead. I don't know. There were such beautiful curls, — at least she wouldn't let me curl it, —

and Dick always liked it so. But it was first cut in the hospital."

Well, may-be t'was a snare, child, and you're pretty enough without, though I oughtn't to say so; and it will all grow again in good time, and I do s'pose God made it, and it's just like floss silk for all the world. And I do believe you've told the truth, every word, though it sounds like something out of a book; and since you've no home and no folks till you hear from Mrs. What-you-call-her, that let herself be married for her money, why you might as well stay here —"

"Oh, if you will let me, good, kind Miss Madeira!" and the soft voice trembled with joy.

"I've lived alone so long t'will seem queer like, — what with being set in my ways, and no children, and going out so much of the time, and being poor; for you can't eat your house, though it's good to have a shelter for your head, and a bed of your very own —"

"And I will wait upon you, and you shall teach me to sew; though I can sew quite good already, for Mrs. Winstead was always making dresses."

"I could take it home, you see, I do sometimes; but the change is good, — going out, as Miss Burgess says. And I do believe your dress is dry, for I can't say that old sack is improvin' to looks, though its good and warm, and you might wear it out in the rain for a month and not hurt it."

Titania slipped into her own attire, while Miss Madeira watched her with wondering eyes. It seemed as if she grew more beautiful every moment. The pearly skin, with its youthful plumpness, the rounded limbs, the graceful movements, nay, the very step, now that she was free from Mrs. Winstead's surveillance, was instinct with seductive grace. The lonely heart yearned toward this vision of loveliness with a more than mother's tenderness, and that almost bashful longing and fear, when one wants, but hardly dares to take. Every pulse throbbed with a strange, sweet

pleasure, the rapture of possession, though it was an unknown language to her, in which she knew not even the a, b, c.

"And, I declare to goodness, if it isn't most noon! Where has all the time gone? I haven't swept up the house, and I didn't even brush off the porch, I was so took with a start seeing something piled up in the corner, and thinking it was a dog, and being afeared of dogs mostly, and they alwers a-mussing up every place so; and there, the sun's a-coming out, which is a good omen, and I don't think I'll be sorry, for you look as much like an angel as them that came to Abraham, — or was it Lot? or both may-be, for I can't remember as I used, only you ought to be dressed in white, but it's too cool for winter."

"Let me help you," said Titania, springing up quickly. "I can sweep and dust very nicely; Hannah said so, at Mrs. Winstead's. I should be so glad to help."

She did it with such dexterity and ease, the smiles coming and going in her fair young face, and her ready thoughts seeming to anticipate Miss Madeira's desires, until suddenly the worthy woman dropped into a chair, and let the long, limp hands fall into her lap.

"Well, you do beat everything I ever see!" she ejaculated. "Why, you could earn a sight o' money going out. There'd be lots of people glad to have you. Not that I want you to go," as the sweet little face overclouded suddenly, "but you need never be in want while you're so handy, for you'd be a treasure anywhere. And now lem me see; we ought to have something nice, but I've that cold meat, and oh," with an air of immense relief, "a meat pie will be just the thing, and a pudding, but it must be rice, for I haven't any suet or any raisins; living so much alone, you see, and not cooking much except on Saturdays, being brought up to keep the Sabbath holy."

They had a royal feast, and were like two children about

it. Titania glowed with happiness; and with every word, every movement, nay, even the glance of her soft, dark limpid eyes riveted the chain that held Miss Madeira captive. And it seemed to Titania that she had known nothing so delightful since the feasts with Dolly St. John.

CHAPTER XXII.

A BREATH OF HAPPINESS.

"I DON'T know what you'll do to-day," said Miss Madeira the next morning, with a rather lugubrious cast of countenance. "I promised Miss Rice to-day — she couldn't get ready for me yesterday; and to-morrow I shan't go out for king nor kaiser. Do you know what kaiser is, my dear?"

"I am not quite sure," returned Titania, doubtfully.

"My father used to say it — strange I never thought of asking him; and now there's the house to sweep, though I might just as well have done it," — with a look of reproach, — "and then if you want to sew patchwork, and if you won't get lonesome, and mind, if anybody knocks to the door you open the shutter and ask what they want, and don't on no account let anybody in, and keep the doors bolted or I shall not have a moment's peace all day long."

"I shall do exactly as you say," returned the child. "Oh, dear Miss Madeira, don't feel at all worried."

"Well, I'll try not; but it's all so strange-like, and I can't think you would be deceiving a poor lorn old body like me, who has never done an ill-turn to a fellow-creetur, knowingly. And now I must go, my dear."

"Miss Madeira," — and a shy, sweet blush suffused the child's face.

"How like a picter you do look. There's that cold meat-pie, and —"

"Oh, it wasn't that, dear Miss Madeira," — and she caught her hand with a soft, imploring gesture, — "if you would only — let me kiss you; I should be happy all day long."

"How foolish, child!" and Miss Madeira blushed with a certain happy shame, that some one should really want to kiss her. "And yet the Apostle talks about it, and it was done in Bible-times, and why shouldn't we, and you're sweet as a rose, and I do declare — there!"

For Titania had caught the thin neck as the head was bent down, and pressed her warm, sweet mouth to wrinkled cheeks and wasted lips, and roused Miss Madeira's long dormant soul to a sense of rapture new and startling. As she went out into the cool, crisp air, the whole world seemed glorified, the autumn sun was brighter than any June day that had ever shone upon her.

Mrs. Rice was waiting for her with two old, ripped-up gowns that were to be made over into one.

"It won't look bad, I think," she said. "Merino is so much like cashmere, and this reps was a splendid piece of goods. I've had that dress eight years with only one making over, but the body and sleeves are gone now. And they put different colors together so much; and what odds does different material make, I should like to know?"

There certainly was no gainsaying this. Economy and 'conjuring' was Miss Madeira's forte and delight, but to-day she found it tiresome, and her wits went wool-gathering. Bits of Titania's story floated through her brain, the unusual kiss still thrilled her, and with it all a strange anxiety — what if it should be a dream, or an imposture? What if she should go home and find her house rifled of its few valuables, its choice heirlooms of silver, her best silk, the woollen blankets her mother had spun in girlhood. And when it came night she would not wait for supper, but made some confused excuse.

"Miss Madeira begins to fail a little," said Mrs. Rice. "She hasn't been here to sew since last June, and I notice a great change in her. Poor old thing! How sad it is to be all alone. Her sister never pays her a bit of attention, and *she* couldn't do enough for her, giving up everything

when she was married. It's a wonder she kept enough to buy that little house."

It had been a long, lonesome, but not unhappy day to Titania. She swept, dusted, put in order, sewed, and had her dinner. Then she looked around for something to read. There was a Bible, a few heavy religious books, and a volume of travels. This she devoured with avidity, scarcely stirring until towards night, when she suddenly found herself cramped and stiff. If she could only go out and take a walk, but she would be strictly true to her trust. She stirred the fire and put on the kettle, and then in a mood compounded of restless happiness, expectation, and the desire to end the strange stillness, she began to hum a gay tune and took a few turns around the room. She had not danced in so long, and now it fairly inspired her. Miss Madeira might have been shocked, but the world outside of Miss Madeira's and Mrs. Winstead's would have been entranced. She could have laughed from pure gladness, she was so happy.

And when Miss Madeira came in to find the lamp lighted, the kettle boiling, the room tidy, and cheerful with human presence, that intangible something in the atmosphere, and caught sight of the bright face with its starry, shining eyes, and cheeks the shade of a ripe peach, she dropped in a chair and was speechless with happiness, fairly bewildered, in fact.

"I've been thinking," she said the next afternoon, when another delightful day had passed, "that something must be said, for Bartlett folks 'll want to know all about you, and it's so strange me a-having any one, with no chick or child, and nothing ever happening since the time 'Mimy made her visit, and I was that beat out with the baby a-crying that I didn't know whether I stood on my head or my feet; and theatres, you know, being wondered at in a little town like this, and some people considering dancing sinful, so may-be Miss Post was right, and you better say

nothing about it; but people will ask, and what can we tell 'em?"

With that Miss Madeira looked up helplessly to the sweet, arch face, smiling over her perplexity.

Titania, child as she was, was much better versed in the world's ways, and perhaps more widely experienced in the sad, sharp wisdom of life.

"There need not be much said, dear Miss Madeira, and we can leave out all that life. You can just explain that I left the woman I was living with, and was going back to some friends in New York, — for I could find Owen Thomas now that I am well, and maybe Dolly St. John, and I know she would be good to me, — but that it stormed, and I asked shelter here, and you thought you'd keep me until I wrote to my friends. I will write to Kate, and perhaps some day I may hear from her; but oh, I don't ever want to go away from you;" and she clasped the thin fingers in her own warm palm.

"Well, I suppose we can make that sound reasonable. Folks'll think it strange my taking in any one; but charity is charity, and I'm a poor lone woman, and why shouldn't I have a bit of company?"

So Miss Madeira took her to church the next day, and on Monday was fortified with her story. Of course she was besieged with questions. Wasn't the child an impostor? Ought she not send her back to the woman who took her, or the institution from whence she came? How could she think of burdening herself with such a charge? She knew nothing about children, and the little girl was too pretty to turn out well. She would get herself into no end of trouble.

Miss Madeira listened, sometimes not very patiently. She had taken the child to her heart, to her love, and something stronger than neighborly advice would be necessary to dislodge her. But the days went and came, and the child proved honest and trusty, and did not run away

with the gold and ornaments of the whole town of Bartlett, as had been predicted.

I doubt if there was a happier home in the whole town that winter. Simple, quaint, near of kin to poverty, full of small straits and economies, and yet so rich in enjoyment. They were like two children; in fact, Miss Madeira in worldly ignorance was only a child of larger growth, and Titania soon became the leading spirit.

She borrowed the book whose singing tea-kettle had made such an impression on her mind, and Titania read it aloud. It proved to be the "Cricket on the Hearth," and together they laughed and cried over it, with its wise, cheery, sweet, unapproachable little Dot. Miss Madeira was not quite clear in her mind whether story-reading was allowable, but they began Little Nell, and their scruples went to the winds.

Titania wrote to Mrs. Chippenham, at Paris, and at New York; but she might as well have dropped both letters into a whirlpool. Indeed, as the months went on, she was so simply happy that she felt afraid of the time when Kate should claim her. In the spring she began to go to school, and though she had an innate shrinking from children, her desire for knowledge gave her a certain bravery. Her education, so far, had been sadly neglected, though in some respects she was in advance, certainly in that strange and bitter experience. Childhood, indeed, had been rudely wrenched out of its proper season, and yet there was a bewildering freshness and fascination in her character, now that it was unfolding. Daily she surprised Miss Madeira, who began to hold her in a curious awe.

They had discussed her name in the early time of her coming.

"It's such an odd name, I never heard it before," exclaimed the lady. "It isn't a Bible name, I'm sure, though there's many a queer name in the Bible. Bathsheba, now, that's my name, but goodness me! no one would ever

think of calling it. Jemima's ever so much nicer, for you can say 'Mimy for short ; but I've always been called Miss Madeira, from the time I was born, I do believe."

"Titania was a fairy queen," said the child. "Dick told me about her."

"But there isn't any such thing as fairies, you know, and father never would allow us to read anything of the kind ; but I did know about Cinderella, and the girl who dropped pearls and diamonds every time she spoke."

"And Dick called me Queenie. Oh, Miss Madeira," she cried eagerly, "if you would only call me that ! Dick loved me so, you see. No one else ever really loved me, though Kate was so kind and indulgent. And now you love me—you *do* really love me?" and the dark eyes shone with an intense light.

"Love you !" One could hardly imagine Miss Madeira's thin voice so full and tender. "I don't know how it feels to have children of your very own ; but I can't bear to think of any one else wanting you or taking you away."

"Maybe they never will. Then I'll go right on living with you, and caring for you, and if you are ever sick nursing you. I think I could do it. Dick was so tender of me, and I'd be just that way, having nice things for you to eat, and reading to you, and bathing your head with perfumes, only I couldn't hold you," and then both children laughed, the elder with tears in her eyes.

And thus the old name fell into disuse, and she became Miss Madeira's little Queen, as she had been Dick Bridger's. Her pretty ways of stateliness and dignity fitted her so well, seemed indeed so much a part of her, that never a name suited better.

The spring came to Bartlett, and Queenie coaxed Miss Madeira out to walk in the woods by coming for her when her day's work was done. The small house took on a new air of beauty and freshness. Flowers stood in saucers and

vases, and the two made a pretty garden-bed in the front yard, that was more comfort than a mine of gold.

Then passed the rich, blooming summer, and autumn with its luscious fruits; Queenie grew taller, but was still slender and lissome as a sylph. A shy little thing with great, wistful, entreating dark eyes, and golden hair that began to curl again; and was a daily wonder to Miss Madeira, whose conscientious scruples concerning the vanity of it vanished.

"For surely if God ever did anything He made your hair curl, and it's a mystery to me with the ways of Providence past finding out, and I'm not clear as to whether it comes under the head of pomps and vanities, when other people buy it and pay out their money every little while for having it curled, and braids and switches, and what not, all out of money that might be sent to the heathen, which you'll never have to do, my dear, unless it comes out dreadfully, with caps gone out of fashion," and Miss Madeira peered over her glasses at the soft, shining mass that it would have broken her heart to cut.

No word from Mrs. Chippenham. Queenie began to settle to her present life as if she had been born in it. The poverty and little straits she scarcely minded. And yet she had some ambitions, and one or two soul-stirring passions. Music moved her keenly, and now she found that she had a clear, sweet voice for singing. Miss Madeira used to sit entranced.

Indeed, the old-fashioned, simple-hearted spinster scarcely knew herself any more, and was as much puzzled as the woman lost on the king's highway. If she had been asked to go to parties and balls, and to be tricked out in silks, satins, and feathers, she could have seen the cloven-foot of the dreaded pomps and vanities. But Queenie's delights were so innocent and wholesome, so full of the natural graces of childhood, albeit different from the childhood of Miss Madeira's early days.

At long intervals Miss Madeira heard from her sister. She had not yet summoned sufficient courage to announce the new inmate in her family, from a misgiving that it would not meet with 'Mimy's approval, as 'Mimy had already bespoken Miss Madeira's small portion for her two little girls.

"Blood's thicker than water, of course," ruminated Miss Madeira, "and it's not likely I'd leave my money to strangers with my own kin standing by, and Queenie's friends may be claiming her long before. But it's not likely that 'Mimy would understand that the child doesn't cost anything to speak of, and is so much company, and I'm sure I don't know now how I ever should get on without her."

Queenie came home from school one day to find Miss Madeira in the utmost consternation, with a letter lying atop of her work-basket, and her glasses dashed up on her head.

"Oh, dear Miss Madeira!" she cried, "what is the matter? Bad news from your sister?"

"Matter? Why, its twins, and both boys: and though the Bible speaks of having a quiver full, and oh, Queenie, do you know how large a quiver is?" with a look of such helpless perplexity that Queenie could not forbear smiling; "and there's the shoes and stockings, and boys always being so hard on 'em, and the holes in the knees of their trousers, and I thank the Lord that I don't have 'em to patch, for I alwers did despise having anything to do with men's clothes, with tobacco in the pockets, and buttons alwers off, to say nothing of the noise when they're babies, and the rampaging round. and oh, dear, poor 'Mimy; and I'm thankful I'm not married, for that makes six!"

"But babies are so cunning." It was the only comforting thing Queenie could find to say.

"It's all right I s'pose. I never could understand much about the decrees, though I'm sure I studied the catechism, and went without supper on Saturday nights if I missed

a word, and I hope 'Mimy's resigned, and all that, though it didn't seem to me that she was real anxious to have any more, along with not liking to take care of children very well. But I hope they'll turn out a credit, and care for 'Mimy in her old days, for somehow it don't seem to me that the captain's forehanded, and 'Mimy's very free about spending."

"We might make them some pretty little garments, dear Miss Madeira, and wouldn't it be nice sometime to have the little girls come and make a visit — in the summer when every thing is so beautiful."

"You are always thinking about other people, Queenie, and making them happy. There isn't a selfish hair in your head."

"And you've always been so good to me, why shouldn't I?" cried Queenie, who was unconsciously beginning to imitate Miss Madeira's inconsequent mode of speech. And then she kissed the wrinkled face as if it had been the sweetest and fairest under the sun.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TWINS AND TROUBLE.

MISS MADEIRA little imagined the important part the twins were destined to play, not only in her own life, but in the future of the child Queenie. The invitation was sent for the two little girls, but their mother declined it in a fretful epistle. How could sister Madeira suppose she could send them all that distance alone, her little treasures that she never trusted out of her sight! And how could she get them ready when they had nothing to wear, and she too miserable to sew, scarcely able to sit up all day. Everybody said she was wearing herself out for her children's sake, and that she was foolish to do it, but sister Maderia could not enter into a mother's feelings for her precious cherubs. The whole family were going out to Long Island, to a cousin of the captain's, where the children could have new milk and fresh berries, and the sea air was recommended to her also. Sister Madeira knew nothing of the struggles and trials of married life, and having your husband away so much, and the care of children, and living on a limited income. Mrs. Mullins always talked of her limited income as if some unseen enemy was wronging her out of part of it.

"Poor thing!" said Miss Madeira, "it must be very hard to have six children of one's own, and they feeling free to cry at all times of night, and eat bread and sugar over the best furniture. I believe, my dear, I'd rather be an old-fashioned dress-maker, working for seventy-five cents

a day and partly found, with now and then a present to eke it out. But we must make up a few clothes for them."

Out of her small savings she sent her nieces and nephews five dollars apiece all around, and she and Queenie sewed diligently. Where did the child get her wisdom, her exquisite taste, her large-hearted tenderness? Not as the world had used her was she paying back, but in that higher, diviner manner, that seemed to blossom out of her sweet and generous soul. Now and then a great mis-giving seized Miss Madeira. Surely Queenie was not of kin with common, every-day folk! Her radiant flower-like face, her exquisite figure, her tiny, slender hands, her bird-like voice, her ways of grace and fascination were out of the common order. To whom did she belong? Surely she ought to be rich, and living in luxury, studying all the wonderful things that so moved and excited her, and having great ladies for her friends. I am afraid foolish old Miss Madeira sometimes wished she were a fairy-godmother for Queenie's sake.

The box went safely, and was tardily acknowledged. Then nothing more was heard for months, indeed until Christmas.

Miss Madeira and her little protegee were invited to a Christmas feast at the house of Mrs. Burgess, whose family had taken a great fancy for the little waif. It had been a long, bright day, with happy children for companions. Queenie had danced and sung with the merriest of them, indeed, it seemed as if she had never been quite so happy in all her life.

They slept late the next morning, and were still at the breakfast-table when the postman knocked. Queenie sprang to the door.

Instead of Mrs. Mullins' fine, scratchy hand, this was directed in large, irregular letters, and had a border of black.

"Oh, Miss Madeira!" she cried in girlish gayety, "perhaps some one has left you a fortune!"

Miss Madeira put on her glasses and studied it, turned it up and down, and around, and even pinched it, making various comments, and then opened it with a curious flutter of nerves.

"Oh, my goodness!" she shrieked. "Lord have mercy on us all! And it's my poor sister!"

Queenie stood pale and trembling.

"My poor, poor 'Mimy, and never saying a word all this while, and me a thinking she was well from her sea-
. 'e trip. It happened so lucky that her husband was home. And he doesn't say what it was, only that she's been ailing ever since the twins were born, and it was a piece of work that she ever had 'em, and I'm to come right away. But what ever shall I do, and I haven't been to New York in years and years!"

She looked up so helplessly, that Queenie came around and kissed her, and strove to comfort. The tears ran down her thin cheeks, and dropped off the end of her nose, into her plate, unheeded.

"You're a great comfort, dear," said Miss Madeira. "And if you'll read that letter over again, may be I've skipped something, with my head being all in a whirl, and oh, poor 'Mimy!"

Queenie read it aloud, and they found that Captain Mullins had been kind enough to specify the train, and promised to meet her. She would be in at eight in the evening.

"And now you must just get yourself ready," began the child, with a woman's composure. "There is almost two hours before train-time, but it is none too much, and I will tidy up the house afterward. Oh, dear Miss Madeira!" and they cried together, as they had more than once before.

If Miss Madeira had been alone I doubt if her journey would have been taken that day. She seemed so

lost, helpless, and sorrow stricken. It was Queenie who looked up her dress, and basted a bit of black crape around the neck; who packed her satchel, not forgetting a dainty little lunch; who looked up her handkerchief and gloves, and walked down to the station with her.

"Oh, my dear, I forgot," she exclaimed, suddenly. "You can't stay alone, a slip of a girl like you; 'twouldn't be prudent or safe, and houses being entered now and then, and tramps about, — though, thank the Lord, they've never been in, — not that I've much to lose, but I shan't feel safe a minute, so you must go and stay with a neighbor."

"Mrs. Burgess will take me in, I think."

"Yes, Mrs. Burgess is the sort of woman to count on, through thick and thin, and you'll tell her how sudden like it was with me, not knowing a word till it fell like a thunder-clap, or I'd come myself. And, my dear, you'll put the silver in the false back in the cupboard, and lock up everything, and be careful of fire; for I've known people to go away and have their houses burnt down over their heads, and they never knowing a word about it till they came back and found a heap of ashes, and I know it's all along of having them twins if anything does happen to me, — but she couldn't help it, poor dear, in her grave, and the Lord sent 'em."

They kissed good-by again and again, and with a shrill shriek the train started off. Queenie retraced her steps, put the little cot in order, while every pulse was stirred with a strange, solemn feeling. She seemed to know this Mullens family as if she had met them in some other life, and with her rarely sympathetic nature their sorrow was hers. Like a dim dream came back the remembrance of her own mamma's death, though she could recall neither voice nor face; only a blank dreariness.

It was afternoon when she put on her hat and cloak and started for the kind neighbor, whose home, with its pictures, rich carpets, and piano was a perfect paradise to her.

Mrs. Burgess welcomed her warmly, and listened to the sorrowful tidings.

"Poor thing! It's sad enough to leave a flock of little ones, and I pity their poor father. But in my opinion, for pure, native worth, Mrs. Mullins couldn't compare with Miss Madeira, whose heart is solid gold, if she has a queer, ungainly body. And I do hope she will not think of burdening herself with that household, and the twins not a year old! If she thought it her duty, there would be no talking her out of it."

There came one letter to Queenie. Miss Madeira had reached her journey's end in safety, and the day after, her sister had been buried. Captain Mullins was to go away in a fortnight, having lost one trip already, and being connected with a South American trading-vessel. They were planning, but she did not know what would be done; and she missed her dear Queenie more than words could tell. She was making some clothes for the children, for the poor dears were almost naked; but she would try to get home soon, for she was well-nigh crazy with the noise and confusion.

Nearly a month elapsed before that event, however, and when she did come, poor Miss Madeira looked older and thinner, and care-worn to the last degree.

"Oh, my dear, darling Queenie!" she cried; "there is nothing in this world like your own vine and fig-tree, be it ever so humble, and I don't much wonder Jonah complained when the gourd withered, seeing 'twas all he had for shelter, though he might have trusted the Lord. And them children do make a Bedlam of the place, and I really thought I should go crazy. You see, poor sister had no sort of government over them, and she thought we was brought up too strict; so she let 'em do just as they liked, and I don't wonder it killed her!"

"And I'm so glad to have you home, so glad!" said the softest and sweetest of voices, and the rosy lips, with their

fragrant breath, were bewildering in their deliciousness. "And I've made the creamiest biscuits, and the loveliest ginger-snaps, you ever saw. I've been studying cooking at Mrs. Burgess', and she would make me bring home a splendid cold chicken and a luscious mince-pie, and I shall feast you as if you were a princess, now that I have you all to myself again."

Miss Madeira stared. What was the nameless, intangible charm? The beauty that was considered a misfortune? Ah, no, at least not altogether. Something higher and finer, more subtile, — the loving, generous, unselfish soul that shone through all, a steady light burning back of limpid eyes, sparkling cheeks, cherry-ripe lips, and dimpled chin. Ah, blood wasn't thicker than water, after all. She loved this stranger better than her sister's children, and though she was horrified at herself, she knew it to be a fact.

There never was such a delightful feast of a supper. Then Miss Madeira must take the large rocker and toast her feet on the stove-hearth, while her little handmaiden deftly washed up the dishes.

"They have a housekeeper," she went on, the Mullins family still being her theme. "I can't say that I like her, though she came highly recommended, and I'd be the last one to breathe a breath of blame or a tinder-spark of scandal against a fellow-creetur, but I couldn't help thinking that she drank more than was good for her, though the doctor ordered it for some sort of weakness, and she strong and ruddy as a milkmaid, though why books always say so I don't know. I hope she'll be good to the children; but such a set of wild Arabs, and such names! You see their mother gave them all long, romantic ones, and their par called them anything. There's Tip, and Pug, and Moppet, and Cissy, and Cassy and Polly, the twins. Castor and Pollux it means; but I never did hear such heathenish names, and they sound just like girls' names for all the

world. And such living as it is—way up on the fourth floor, with your clothes drying out of the window, and not a bit of grass to bleach on; but handy enough when you get there, and no need to come down-stairs often. But I felt as if I was up in a balloon, and such crowds and crowds of people, it alwers tired me to look at 'em. And money being spent just as if there was no end to it, but I'm afraid poor sister wasn't much of a hand at economy, and seven silk gowns, but so greased and soiled that they were a sight to behold. The cleaning and scouring, and altering and fixing, I've done, I declare some nights I couldn't sleep, but I do hope they'll get along."

It was a never-failing subject of conversation. Miss Madeira had been through with an entirely new experience, and the ideal she had cherished of 'Mimy was doomed to a slow, cruel process of dis-illusion. The pomps and vanities had proved veritable quicksands in the case of the weaker character. Mrs. Mullins unfortunately developed into a feeble, fretful, selfish, vain, and slatternly woman, a woman whom the captain could hardly have failed to despise if he had been compelled to remain with her constantly. Miss Madeira saw many evidences of her shortcomings, but she was her sister, so she only said "Poor 'Mimy," and sighed over her. And she had hardly been won toward the children. Tip and Pug called her an old maid, and asked where she had lost her waterfall, and what made her nose so sharp and shiny. Moppet criticised her attire, and Cissy insisted that she was a cross, old thing; so no wonder Miss Madeira was glad to get back to her own bright, loving Queenie.

But alas! There were three months of quiet enjoyment, when, one afternoon, Captain Mullins presented himself with a heart-rending story. He had come home to find that his housekeeper had gone off, taking with her whatever small articles of value she could lay hands on; that she had run him in debt to grocer and butcher and baker,

and that the household was completely demoralized. Wouldn't Miss Madeira come and take charge? Tip had gone into an office, the others must be sent to school, and the twins —

Miss Madeira was filled with consternation. She said, faintly at first, that they might come here, but her brother-in-law pointed out the inadequacy of the house to contain such a roistering lot, the inconvenience it would be to him, and the many advantages for business in the city. "There will be four boys to rear and to establish in business, and what could we do in a little country place like this?" said the captain, glancing around the bird's nest, and warming to the prim but motherly hen with her one chick. "I can't make it a great object, Miss Madeira, for what with the long doctor's bills and nurse's and funeral, and now this last misfortune, I am still behindhand. But I will take care that you don't lose anything. I've been thinking it over when I made up my mind to ask you, and if you would be willing to rent your house for a few years, you'd have your living, and wages beside, and I'd do the very best I could for you. Otherwise I am afraid I must break up my home and put my children around in schools or institutions where they care for poor, motherless things. But I like so to see them altogether when I come in port."

Miss Madeira wiped her eyes, and her brother-in-law took courage to urge his proposal. Indeed, as he warmed with his subject, he began to think, man-fashion, that it would really be better for her than going on year after year alone.

"I'm clear beat and dumbfounded," she said to Queenie, as they were once more by themselves, after having lighted the captain to the spare chamber. "My dear, I feel as if some one had hit me a hard slap on the side of my head, with my ears all a-ringing and noises in 'em, and those dreadful children but my own poor sister's flesh and blood, and she a-laying in her grave. I don't

want to do it, and I feel a drawing that way with a sense of duty all the time, and living in the house with other people, and a great, noisy, dirty city, that you can never clear up Saturday afternoons for Sunday. It would be selfish, me a-staying here and them poor children going to ruin; but how can I leave this house, where I've lived so long, and every inch of rag carpet the work of my own hands, and the chair-cushions with bits of people's dresses in 'em and some of 'em dead, and poor mother's blue ware that I've drank tea out of ever since 'Mimy was married, for she wanted the china, and would you believe it there isn't a smitch of that china left, and poor mother setting such store by it that she would only take it out when Elder Perkins come to tea. But whatever shall I do?" and she looked at Queenie in a most pathetically helpless manner.

A strange desire had flashed over Queenie during the evening's conversation. Bartlett was lovely with its green fields and quiet river, its pretty cottages and quaint, old-fashioned ways. But something stirred her like a distant ring of martial music. If she could get to the city without leaving Miss Madeira!

"Are the children so very bad?" she asked slowly, cautiously attacking the outposts.

"Well, my dear, they're different in cities. What with standing on their heads so much, and whistling, and wearing out the knees of their trousers, I do believe I patched every pair, some of 'em twice over. And I never was much of a hand for babies, and they two alike as two peas with their thumbs in their mouths. Oh, I don't believe I ever could, and if it rose up against me at the judgment-day, the Lord saying, 'Miss Madeira, where are them poor, motherless children that you didn't clothe and feed,' — figgeratively, my dear, for their father'll pay for it all, — 'and visit and care for, but let 'em go to destruction because you wanted to sit in ease and comfort under your own

vine and fig-tree, not doing the Lord's will like an ungrateful Jonah.' "

"I'd help you, dear Miss Madeira," and Queenie laid her shining, golden head on the other's knee, while she pressed the thin hand on her warm, dimpled cheek. "Maybe—" and there rushed over her a sudden vision. Kate—Maggie, a strange, intangible future, with something in its dim horizon that made every pulse thrill.

"I couldn't think of going without you, Queenie, And maybe you might find your folks. But I don't know's I could give you up, Queenie; and if I did I don't believe I could live alone again, there's such a drawing in my soul to some human thing, after being alone nigh on to fifty years without a chick or a child, and Cissy's hair being curly, like yours, only redder, and Pug calling her Bricktop and other names. And if it's a decree of Providence 'twill be so in the end, no matter how I may fight agin it, and I have a feeling in my bones it will be, but I don't want to go for all that."

Queenie comforted and soothed, and perhaps coaxed a little in her soft, cunning way, and after a good cry Miss Madeira tied on her night-cap and knelt down to pray that she might be directed rightly.

"I don't know but I've made a sort of golden calf of this place," she broke out again, suddenly, after they were settled snug in bed. "I've put my ear-rings and trinkets, which is a figger, in it, and fixed everything to my liking, for you see we had to sell the old house when 'Mimy was married, on account of there being more room, and she wanting her money, and she picking out what she liked in bedding and linen, going among strangers and wanting to look as good as the best, and not a stitch of 'em left now, and I've had my way here like the children in the wilderness when Moses was out of sight, and grown that fond of everything that I do 'spose it's pretty near to idolatry, so the Lord's going to show me that we have no abiding

city here, and that it's no use filling our barns and store-houses, but we must go out to the heathen, and if there ever was a set of wild Arabs it's poor 'Mimy's children, though they are my own kith and kin. And now good-night, dear, and we will see what to-morrow will bring forth."

To-morrow morning brought a fresh array of arguments to distract Miss Madeira. Her conscience was too sensitive to allow her to shun a distasteful duty, and yet it was like wrenching out her soul to leave Bartlett. More than once she said she could not.

"If I were at home regularly, Miss Madeira, I would not ask it of you," said Captain Mullins. "If I could oversee a housekeeper or a servant daily; but to be away three months or so leaves the children entirely at the mercy of strangers. Even if you would promise to stay a year or two, that would be a great favor."

She promised before he left her, and then began a sad time for poor Miss Madeira.

"A very foolish woman," said some of her neighbors. "She'll never be sorry but once, and that all the time. The idea of her bothering with children!" and indeed, the whole neighborhood seemed to be in an undue state of commotion.

"I know just how you feel," exclaimed Mrs. Burgess, kindly. "It will be a great cross and trial, but I do think you are right. The only pity is that you cannot bring them here, city influences are so bad for children. And we shall all miss you so much."

That was a grateful meed.

"And now, Miss Madeira, what are you going to do with Queenie?"

"Do with her!" and Miss Madeira stared. "Why, I couldn't go without her, and the only comfort is her taking to it so naturally. It isn't as if she had lived here all her life."

"I should be very glad to take the child. We all like her so much."

"No, I couldn't spare her. Giving up my own home will be hard enough;" and Miss Madeira wiped some tears from her eyes.

Then Mrs. Stent came with an offer.

"If you *must* go away, and want to rent the house and furniture, sister Wardlow will jump at the chance. There's just her and Hetty, and they're both as neat as wax; but since John brought home his wife it hasn't been quite the same to them, for he is only a step-son, you know. She can have her living there, or three hundred a year, and I told her I'd take the money and go. And now if you'd rent them your house they will be in clover."

So, Providence opened the path for them to go. Miss Madeira packed up her choicest belongings and stored them, crying over every article, and repeating its story until Queenie was infected with a like spirit of sorrow. And yet she was glad, with the buoyant temperament of childhood, to go to a wider sphere, to enjoy new sights and sounds, and to feel that fate had something different in store for her. She was not quite satisfied to grow up and go out dress-making with her dear Miss Madeira, much as she loved her.

Mrs. Wardlow came over the last day to take possession.

"It's an ill wind that blows no one any good," she said delightedly. "I shall be as happy here as a bee in a sugar-cask, and when you want a little run, and a change, you must come out and spend a week or two, you'll always be welcome. And you have gone to do a good work, Miss Madeira, though you must trust to Providence for a reward, for you won't get any in this ungrateful world."

The trunks were packed and sent away, and Miss Madeira lingered on the threshold.

"And to think here's just where you were curled up in

the corner, and I came out and found you in the morning, thinking it was a dog, — and you've been such a comfort, — never dreaming then we was to set out together some day to seek our fortunes like; and may God lead us back to the old home in thankfulness when our duty's done; so kiss me, Queenie, in your own loving way, as if every door and window said good-by."

CHAPTER XXIV.

SO NEAR, AND YET SO FAR.

CAPTAIN MULLINS came to meet them, the vessel being laid up for repairs. He had been moving, too, — a little shell of a place, but he knew Miss Madeira would like living by herself best, and he wanted a new neighborhood for the children. Rents were high, but this was up near the Park, and maybe they wouldn't mind the shanty-like appearance.

It certainly was old and rickety. Its compeers had been torn down, to make way for more pretentious houses, but the neighborhood was fair; there was a school not far distant, and Tip could ride to and fro in rainy weather. Everything was in heaps and piles, and very discouraging, the family being presided over by a brawny Irishwoman, with a brogue that was the envy and distraction of Pug.

Tip, whose real name was Montgomery De Lisle, was now about fourteen, much given to slang and smartness, and feeling himself of immense consequence. Pug, some three years younger, rejoiced in the cognomen of Lafayette Sydenham, but certainly the shorter name was more appropriate. He was short and stout, with scrubby, reddish hair, a very much freckled face, a nose that turned up, a short upper lip, with a similar tendency, and a funny round chin, that betokened a like aspiration. Moppet was eight, and something in the same style, softened into girlish prettiness, I was about to say, but she was only pretty with the superb health and audacity of childhood, while Cissy had dark hair, and eyes like her father.

But the twins!

They were as much like two puffy, solemn, blinking toads as anything you ever saw. They had surely thriven on dirt and neglect, when other motherless babies would have died. Perhaps their very lawlessness was the key-note to their health. None of the children minded anything. They ran out in the sunshine or the rain; they slept in their clothes or out of them, in a bed, or in the corner where they happened to tumble, and nothing seemed to make any difference. It was an absolute triumph over civilization.

"This is your aunt Madeira," announced their father. "You remember she came when your ma died. She is going to take charge of you, and I hope you'll all be good and obey her. Bridget, show Miss Madeira her room, and then help take up the trunks. I hope you are not very tired, for I want a good talk to-night, as to-morrow, at ten, I shall be off again."

Queenie stared at the little group, in amazement, and then followed Miss Madeira. The room was in tolerable order. It had a worn, dingy velvet carpet on the floor, a very-much battered black walnut suite, with stained marble tops, glaring glass and china vases, and a toilet-set, in which there was hardly a whole piece. Added to this some pictures, in tarnished gilt frames, and a soiled and tumbled counterpane on the bed, and you will grant that the room did not look very inviting.

This was a fair sample of the whole house. Mrs. Captain Mullins had been addicted to cheap finery, and now the remnants wore a very shabby look. Miss Madeira cried a little, and then said things would look better when they had a thorough good cleaning.

The children were terrible, certainly. Miss Madeira was so dazed and astonished that she could not eat a mouthful. Queenie was struck with a sort of mirthful wonder at so much turbulence.

At eight the next morning the captain said good-by, after exhorting them all to be very good, and promising to bring them home something wonderful if they were, and then uttering a hasty farewell. Moppet followed him out to the sidewalk, and, sitting down on the stoop step, absolutely howled, while the twins joined in chorus. Cissy ran back and began to ride down the banisters, and Pug declared they would have jolly times, "now the guv'ner had taken out."

"You're a wicked boy!" shrieked Moppet. "Suppose pa should get drowned, and you could never see him again!"

"Pooh! Who ever heard of a sea-captain being drowned! They can always swim!" was Pug's reply, in withering disdain.

"I'll just tell him when he comes home, you bad, miserable boy, with no respect —"

"Shut your head, brick-top! What do girls know? And they're always telling tales!"

With that Moppet forgot her grief, and sprang up fiercely. The two clinched for a scrimmage.

It was no unusual thing. They often settled a dispute in this fashion.

"Oh dear!" cried Miss Madeira, wringing her hands. "Their poor mother in her grave, and their father hardly out of sight! Whatever am I to do with 'em? I've never had a chick nor child, and this is worse than contrary hens, when you try to shoo them out of a door-yard. And there is that sweet little hymn they don't know a word of — 'But children you should never let,' — and oh, there's the twins!"

Miss Madeira stood there, the picture of despair and bewilderment. Bridget rushed out and parted the combatants, administering to each sundry cuffs. Pug wriggled out, and ran down the street, his fingers applied suggestively to his nose. Moppet was brought in by the shoulder

and thrust into a chair, from which she rose like a Jack in a box the instant Bridget's hand left her.

The twins always cried when any one else did, seeming to be touched more deeply by sympathy than by their own sorrows. They sat on the floor, now, two puffy pyramids, howling to the extent of their lungs. Cissy was consoling herself by building a wall of the best books.

Queenie laughed at the ludicrous picture, then stooped to comfort the wailing babies. Miss Madeira recovered a little from her astonishment, and ventured to advise Cissy about the books, but was told to "Mind her own business, and not come bossing her, or she'd find herself higher'n a kite," at which she prudently withdrew.

But presently a show of order reigned, and the two girls, remembering their father had given them a quarter apiece, rushed out to spend it, Cissy giving the books a farewell kick.

Miss Madeira took Queenie up-stairs for counsel. Never in all her life had that worthy woman been so perplexed.

"If I had not promised, and poor, dear sister lying in her grave, with the children all in rags again, and the house not fit to be seen; and he said I was to do just what I liked; but there's no home like your own; and if we only were back, Queenie, for I am afeared this will be the death of me as to wits, for I can't remember so much as a night-cap or a handkerchief; and they laying out in their nice piles at home, and the drawers and everything a mop of dirt here. I only wonder poor sister didn't die long ago, and I shall not draw a decent breath till the house is all cleaned over again. As for Bridget — Captain Mullins said I might send her away, and have a woman to wash and iron instead; as for the cooking, I'm afeared of such messes, and potatoes not boiled fit to eat. Whatever shall we do?"

Her look was so pathetic that Queenie flew to her and kissed the thin cheek.

"It is dreadful, dear Miss Madeira, but we might get the

house cleaner by and by, and the children in better order. Moppet and Pug could go to school, and that would make a little quiet; then I think I could look after Cissy and the babies."

"You do draw things out of a snarl so, Queenie. The Lord must a'known all about this when you ran away, and huddled up in a corner of the stoop, and me a-sleeping in a Christian bed, which I never can forgive myself, but for being timid and not liking to search round out of doors at night. But you are a darling and a pieter, and the great comfort of my life, coming here to this hurrying, worrying city where one can't get a breath, with an Irish servant-girl at their elbow. The captain said I must take the children to school, but I don't know where it is; and oh, my! I feel like a hen with her head cut off, caterin' round and not able to see where she's going."

Miss Madeira cried a little, then wiped her eyes, and declared she must do something or she should lose the little sense God had given her.

So to work they went with a good will. Up came the carpet in Miss Madeira's room, and in spite of Bridget's declaration "that the whole house had been kalsomined, and that white-washing was so old-fashioned no lady would think of living in a white-washed house," Miss Madeira procured some lime, and rejoiced in the fresh, wholesome smell. Drawers, closets, nooks, and corners, underwent a thorough revision. Bridget went off in high dudgeon. "She knew a rale lady when she saw her, and she wasn't going to put up with a skimpy old maid who didn't have sinse enough to wear an overskirt or a waterfall!"

"I'm glad she's gone!" exclaimed Miss Madeira, much relieved. "And to tell the truth, Captain Mullins could not afford the waste of that creature, my dear, — with soap and starch and sugar disappearing in a twinkling, and cold meat thrown away that could be cooked over, and the pieces of bread, — as if we lived right over a mint of money

and shovelled it up like so much coal; and she a-setting the children up against me all the time, and fair to my face; but you can't most always tell, and beauty is vain, though she was the plainest woman I ever saw, and not young either that she should throw being an old maid in my face; yet I've come to thank the Lord for that, and a quiet life when I had it; but His way is past finding out, which is a comfort, for if I'd had these children and poor dear dead sister to think of all my life, I'd nigh about gone crazy, and I don't know but I shall now."

After about a month they reached a state of tolerable order. The house was clean, the meals well cooked, the two older children in school, Cissy and the twins reduced to a state of management through Queenie's patience and happy adaptiveness. There was not an angel among them all, in fact they were sometimes so bad that Queenie was at her wits' end. Yet they took to her wonderfully, in fact began to adore her, and generally obeyed her much more readily than they would their aunt.

It was hard work for Queenie, and yet she would not have gone back to her simple country life. Here was the great, boundless city, the throngs of people, the stir and activity, the intangible something that she could not, dared not put into words, but she knew it was the hope of finding an old friend some day, of stepping into a new and different existence.

And there was the wonderful park. She used to take the babies and Cissy, and though it was a task to draw the lumpy little ones in their wagon, the sights and sounds always repaid her. To sit and dream under the shady trees, to see the elegant carriages go by with their smiling and richly dressed occupants, to watch the great ladies out with their babies, who were all a fleece of lawn, lace, and embroidery, and trim, jaunty nursemaids, was like reading a page out of a book. In one sense it educated her. She came to have a certain style in carrying herself,

in speaking, even in the graceful indolence with which she would sometimes sit. More than one person gave her a second glance, but she was very modest, and still too much of a child to attract any designing watcher.

If only some day Kate would come riding by! Or how strange it would be if among the many nurses she should some time light upon Maggie. When these thoughts entered her mind a sudden thrill would send the blood speeding through her veins.

Once she and Miss Madeira went down Broadway.

"It is just here that I was lost," she cried, pointing out the place. "Maggie went over, and I was so frightened that I ran back, and down some street. How wild I was! I do wonder what became of Maggie, and whether she ever found my own papa?"

Miss Madeira could not answer, but she caught the child's arm tightly, lest she should be lost again.

Captain Mullins returned to find the most wonderful charm worked in his household. True, Tip was full of airs and graces, and the authority of a boy who begins to feel great, but he appreciated the cleanliness and order. Pug stood on his head, turned summersaults, and puzzled aunt Madeira with the funniest and sauciest of slang, but even he was improving. Moppet cried and quarrelled; she could pick a dispute out of an empty peanut shell, but her father thought her marvellously toned down. As for the babies, they were simply perfection.

I doubt if Captain Mullens had ever so enjoyed being on shore, — certainly not since the first year of his marriage. Miss Madeira might be old and queer, and jumble her sentences all together, but it could be forgiven in a woman who made such bread, and could cook a steak to perfection, to say nothing of dishes that were polished until they shone, and chair-backs that felt clean to the touch.

Of course the children rioted and broke out of all syste-

matic habits, — it was vacation, besides being the occasion of their father's visit, — but they had a grand good time. He hired a great family carriage, and took them all about the park, and afterwards they went up for sails on the lake, and donkey-rides. What a gala time it was, to be sure!

"I don't see how you have managed, sister Madeira," exclaimed the captain; "and to get along without a servant! I am afraid you are making it too hard for yourself and little Queenie here. You must have some witchcraft."

Miss Madeira smiled, and pushed up her glasses.

"You see," she said, as if apologizing, "Queenie and I have been so used to working in our own fashion that we can't stand other peoples' ways, and they're that careless and dirty, besides the expense, and too impudent, with setting up what a lady shan't do, and what she shall, and keeping you out of the kitchen that they may throw away enough for two or three, economy looking stingy to them. I'm glad you're pleased, and I hope you'll think that poor, dear sister would be satisfied if she could see it all."

"Satisfied!" And then Captain Mullins bethought himself. He would not reflect on the dead; but he knew in his soul that nothing ever had quite satisfied Mrs. Mullens, even when she had been indulged in her own way to the uttermost.

Queenie captivated him just as she had the other members of the family. He used to watch her pretty, motherly ways with the children, her happy faculty of settling disputes, and her many methods of amusement, being much wiser in this respect than Miss Madeira.

He became strangely interested in her history as well, and wondered whether it would not be a good thing to advertise.

"And I think she ought to go to school," he said, kindly. "I feel that I have no right to take all her time for my children. She will grow up to womanhood, ere long; and she is too pretty to be left at the mercy of ignorance."

Miss Madeira talked it over with her.

"I'd rather stay at home, and help you," she cried, "and study some, as I get a chance. But oh, Miss Madeira, if Captain Mullins thought he could — it would cost a good deal, I suppose, but it would make me so happy ;" and her soft, dark eyes were all aglow with hope.

"What is it, my dear ?"

"If I could take lessons in music! Madame Felix would teach me, and it would be so delightful. Sometimes I take the babies in, and she plays for me and sings. I can't tell how it is, only I seem then to remember something about my own mamma. And she thinks I could learn so easily."

"I wonder if it would be good judgment?" said Miss Madeira, thoughtfully. "If you could learn enough to teach ; but there'd be the piano, and they cost a mint of money, — not but what you deserve it all, and more, — and maybe the captain'd want a piano for Moppet and Cissy, though why people shouldn't have good Christian names, and be called by them, puzzles me. Sister used to think Bible names so dreadful, and I can't say that Bathsheba is an easy one to call, but Daphne and Psyche don't better the matter any, to my thinking. And Mullins, somehow, seems so plain a name to tack all the others to."

Queenie laughed a little. Captain Mullins liked the fanciful names bestowed by his wife so little, indeed, that he never used them. If the children had not been christened he would certainly have suggested that Miss Madeira rename them to her liking.

The music plan was mentioned, and Captain Mullins assented most cordially, though he could hardly give up the school. Madame Felix lived at the end of the block, — kept house in a simple, half French, fashion in three rooms, supporting herself and her blind, invalid husband, — a small, dark, plain woman, who had taken a great fancy to

the sunny-haired girl, and asked her in now and then of an evening.

Miss Madeira went to call with Queenie. Madame Felix received them cordially, and spoke with a pretty accent that made you forget her plainness. She would be delighted to take the little girl; she knew her so well already, and she had a musical face, musical hands, too. And if she would come in the evening, for madame had all the day engagements that she could attend to.

Queenie was wild with delight. And then Captain Mullens had to go away, much to his sorrow, for he had never so enjoyed his home. Moppet was inconsolable, and made so much trouble that Miss Madeira was at her wits' end; but then school began, which created quite a diversion, and quieted the house wonderfully.

Two evenings a week Queenie spent with her new friend, Madame Felix. She always gave the babies their supper, and put them to bed; indeed, Miss Madeira was helpless as a baby herself when it came to managing them. But when Queenie took them in hand they generally yielded at once, allowed their hands and faces to be washed, and trotted up-stairs in the wake of their small mistress, whose rule was of the gentlest. If they were very bad she would not sit by the crib and sing, but go down at once. When they saw her golden head vanishing from the door-way, they gave in, and cried out, "Polly will be dood!" "Tassy will be dood!" and then Queenie would run back smiling, and kiss their little red lips.

There had been one quite serious mutiny with the older ones after their father's departure. Pug and Moppet had behaved dreadfully to their aunt, and told her she was a sharp-nosed old maid, who had come there purposely to marry their father, but that they wouldn't have her for a step-mother; indeed, Pug declared he would punch her head first.

"Marry your father!" cried Miss Madeira, aghast;

"when I haven't a chick nor a child of my own except Queenie, and a nice comfortable home, where I shouldn't have to work half so hard! Marry your father when your poor, dear mother is hardly cold in her grave! What wicked children to think of such a thing!"

"Then you had better march," said Pug, with an air of authority. "We don't want you poking around here. We can get along with Queenie."

Miss Madeira tried to reason, to command, but the battle only raged the more fiercely.

At this juncture Queenie entered the room, and took in the scene.

"Children!" she cried, "holding her golden-crowned head up to its fullest height, — "children, I am amazed at you! Do you really want aunt-Madeira to go away?"

There was a chorus of affirmative voices.

"Very well." Then she went straight over to Miss Madeira, and put her arms around the astonished woman's neck. "Dear Miss Madeira, let us go away, since the children are so naughty. We will find a servant to take care of them, and we two will live in peace and happiness in your pretty little cottage."

"I don't care!" ejaculated Moppet, sulkily.

"But we don't want *you* to go!" shouted Pug. "We like you. You may stay and marry father when you get to be a big woman, and we'll all mind you. But we don't want any old maids around."

"We shall both go," said Queenie, firmly. "Come, dear Miss Madeira, let us go up-stairs and pack our trunks."

"You shan't go," screamed Cissy, catching Queenie's dress. "I love you, and who will tell us stories, and tuck us up in bed, and make 'lasses candy, and sing for us, and take us to the Park?"

Queenie put the child aside, and led Miss Madeira upstairs. She paused, bewildered, and glanced into the soft, dark eyes.

"We must let them believe it, auntie Madeira," she said, gayly, yet there were tears glittering on her long lashes.

"I wonder if they think I should be such an old fool as to marry their father?" she jerked out. "Me, without a chick nor a child, and they the very torments of the earth! I should be glad enough to have him marry some one who will make them stand around sharp. Oh, dear, it is an ungrateful office, and if it was my mother instead of me Moppet would get spanked soundly, the audacious little huzzy! But I don't feel as if I could beat one of my poor, dear sister's children, and she hardly cold in her grave."

"Oh, no, don't beat them, poor little things," said Queenie, pitifully, and then she smiled, knowing the rebels richly deserved it.

There was a great uproar in the kitchen for a while, then it subsided, and the three dispersed in the street. Queenie brought up some bread and milk, and fed the babies, made a cup of tea for Miss Madeira, and cut a plate of sandwiches, which they two enjoyed.

It was dusk when the children came in, hungry as bears from their run, and prepared to oppose lawful authority to the uttermost. There was no light, the fire was nearly out, and instead of the plentiful supper an empty table. Had Queenie and aunt Madeira really gone?

Cissy began to cry. Pug made a light, and ransacked the pantry. There was some bread, but the butter-jar could not be found; the cake-tin contained only a few broken pieces.

"There always seemed to be enough for supper," exclaimed Pug. "I wonder what they can have done with it?" glancing around in perplexity.

"Do you suppose they really will go?" and Moppet's bravado began to ooze out. "I am afraid to stay alone at night."

"I'm afraid, too," and Cissy cried louder than ever.

Moppet undertook to make her hush, but it ended by the little one running up-stairs.

Moppet and Pug set about making a fire, with a vague idea that the supper would in some way prepare itself. They raised a great smoke, and burned their fingers, which seemed to be the signal for another scrimmage.

Cissy, meanwhile, found refuge up-stairs, being taken on Queenie's lap and undressed, but she had to go to bed supperless. The twins were sleeping sweetly, unconscious of the mutiny in the household.

"I don't want you to go away," said Cissy, between tears and cunning little kisses. "You will stay and give me some breakfast, won't you?"

"Ask auntie Madeira. If she goes, I must go too."

"But you won't go, dear auntie Madeira?" said the little thing, coaxingly. "I should starve. And I won't be naughty any more. I do love you."

With that she crawled up in Miss Madeira's lap, and made all manner of promises.

"Dear little thing," said Miss Madeira, after Cissy had been tucked in bed. "They're not pretty, and they all have such heathenish names, but one can't help loving them, and my not being fond of children naturally; only it happened so lucky, Queenie, that the Lord sent you to prepare the way, like John the Baptist. But I'm afraid I am an old fool, after all!"

"Dear Miss Madeira, you are the best and sweetest friend in the wide world. Think how you took me in, a stranger, and how you have loved me. And that is the quality of your love."

"But you're near to being an angel. It's no great stretch of love to be good to you."

And then the sweet young girl and the foolish old girl clasped hands tenderly.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE QUEEN OF THE HOUSEHOLD.

PUG went out and borrowed ten cents of a boy he knew, and bought a generous cut of Washington pie, but woman-like, Moppet had to stay at home. It was chilly in the kitchen, and her burnt finger hurt sadly. She cried a little, took another search through the pantry, and then ran up-stairs rapidly, feeling that there might be some one behind to catch her. Cissy was not asleep. She had to tell over her good fortune. She was not going to be naughty any more; and if auntie Madeira went home, she was going with her, and the twins, and Moppet could get her own breakfast; and Pug was as naughty as he could be.

"Pug is awfully bad," said Moppet. "I think father ought to take him to sea next time. We should get along real nicely without him. Only aunt Madeira is an old maid."

"I like old maids. I mean to be one myself," returned Cissy, confidently. "And I'll have a little house in the country, and when your children are dreadful bad I shall go there and stay, and you'll be awfully sorry."

"I'm hungry; I know that," was the rather grim and irrelevant rejoinder.

"And auntie Madeira makes such good things to eat," said the little gourmand.

Moppet sighed. "Do you really believe she will go, and Queenie? And will we have any breakfast?"

Cissy rose up in the bed, her dark eyes staring solemnly, and filled with a new resolve.

"Mop," and she put her arms tightly about her sister's

neck, "let's go and coax her! You just say you're sorry, and that you won't do so any more. You *are* a little sorry, aren't you?" and her tone was one of strategic entreaty.

"Well, my finger's burned, and I'd like to have something to eat," returned Moppet, with a deliberation that could hardly be esteemed penitential. "And some of the girls at school said pa would marry her. I shouldn't mind a real nice, pretty step-mother, with curly hair, and diamond rings, and silk dresses, and oh, a carriage to take us out in the park! I'd love her, and be ever so good."

"We might ask pa about it when he comes back," said Cissy.

"I guess I can wait until morning," began Moppet, presently. "I'm getting nice and snug now, and shall soon be sleepy, and my finger doesn't hurt so much as it did."

But for all that Cissy fell asleep the first, and Moppet had rather a solemn time with her thoughts. Once she was sure she heard robbers in the house, and quickly covered up her head. It would be terrible to live alone, without aunt Madeira."

Pug came in, and stumbled up-stairs in the dark, for he didn't know just where to find a lamp. Then Queenie went softly down and locked the doors and windows.

"But there's to-morrow!" said the troubled woman, brushing out her little wisp of hair and twisting it very tight.

"And a good many to-morrows," laughed Queenie. "But I think when the rebels are starved out they will capitulate. At all events, it won't do for us to haul down our colors."

Pug was up quite early, for a wonder. There was a stir in aunt Madeira's room, and the twins were talking, but the kitchen was deserted. He sauntered around, whistled to keep up his courage, was desperately hungry,

walked round the block, came back and roused Moppet. Seven o'clock — half past — eight.

Cissy went to reconnoitre, and came back with big eyes swimming in tears.

"They are really going," she announced. "The trunk is packed, the babies are dressed and waiting, and their hats and things are on the bed. And Queenie said" — here her voice quivered over a big sob — "that I had better stay with you, but I don't want to, and I do want some breakfast."

His little sister's sorrow made Pug feel rather solemn. Moppet's defiance was all gone out of her face, and she did look really troubled.

"I could do well enough if it wasn't for you girls," said Pug, with a mannish air. "But, I say, how did Tip get some breakfast?"

Queenie could have told of a private arrangement, made last evening, whereby Tip was to go to an eating-house.

"And oh, suppose he's run away!" cried Moppet, "and we're to be left all alone. Oh, Pug, if you only hadn't said — if you hadn't been so very bad and saucy — stop crying, Cissy."

"I wasn't any worse than you," was the quick rejoinder. "You said you wouldn't have a cross old maid in the house —"

"Well, you said we needn't mind her —"

"And we needn't —"

"But if we should starve. Oh, you bad, wicked boy!" and Moppet burst into loud crying.

Queenie opened the door, and came out with her Sunday hat and dress on, and a little satchel in her hand.

"Pug," she said, pleasantly, "don't you want to walk round to the express office with me? Moppet, I wouldn't cry so. You had better be getting Cissy some breakfast."

Moppet made one rush and had her arms around Queenie's neck.

"Oh, Queenie, darling, don't go and leave us," she cried, over her sobs. "We might be kidnapped and sold to doctors, to be cut up for our bones, — a girl told me so in school; and I don't know how to get breakfast, and I haven't any money, and I'm afraid to stay alone, and you shan't go —"

"No, you shan't!" screamed Cissy, who dropped on the floor and caught her ankles, nearly toppling her over.

"What makes you, Queenie? Oh, do stay," pleaded Pug, with a quivering voice.

"Children," — and Queenie held herself up with a lovely, yet gracious, dignity, — "children, *I* am going because you are so naughty to aunt Madeira. She is so good and kind, and I love her so well that I cannot see her treated disrespectfully. She only came here for your sakes, to take care of you, your papa begged her so hard to do it. When he comes home you must tell him how it was —"

That put a new and more embarrassing aspect upon affairs for Pug.

"Oh, Queenie," ask her to stay," he exclaimed. "Pa would be so very angry."

"No," she answered, decisively, "I am not going to ask her to stay, for I think she will be much happier in her own quiet little home, with no one to worry her, or to be ungrateful for her labor, and patience, and love. And I belong to her, so I cannot stay."

"But what are we to do?" cried the chorus of voices.

"Perhaps if you were all to go to her," — and Queenie looked at the group out of her great, soft, brown eyes, — "and tell her you were sorry, for I think you do love her a little, and are really glad to have her take care of you."

"I'll go," and Moppet sprang to the door, followed by Cissy.

Pug stood irresolute. Indulgent as their mother had

been to these little Arabs, she seldom made an appeal to their love or duty, and never to their principle.

But Queenie was bent on being master of the situation. She looked so brave and bewitchingly lovely as she stood there that she might easily have won a more obdurate heart than the boy's."

"Pug," she said, softly, laying her fair hand on the boy's shoulder, "I think you were really the ringleader. You are older than Moppet, and we expect courage, and honor, and manliness from you, because some day you are to be a gentleman. The least you can do is to tell aunt Madeira you are sorry, — that is, if you would like to have her stay."

"Come with me," replied Pug, in the gruff tone a boy not infrequently uses when he is moved by a tender feeling, and is half ashamed to show it. So they went to aunt Madeira's room, where Moppet was crying in her arms, and Cissy was explaining it to the solemn-looking twins, and what happened no one could quite have told, but they cried and kissed all round, and made promises; and then Queenie asked Pug if he did not want to go out with her, and buy something for breakfast, so that they could have a regular feast. Of course he did. Aunt Madeira went down to the kitchen and made the fire. There was no school for them that morning, and never were a set of little prodigals happier over a fatted calf. I think they would all then and there have consented to aunt Madeira's becoming their stepmother, instantly, if Queenie had proposed it.

However, it was a substantial victory for aunt Madeira. Pug and Moppet began to think a little, and improved under the process. Queenie they adored. Moppet insisted that she should be their big sister, and be called Queenie Mullins, which was hardly a more ridiculous ending than in their own case.

Matters went on very comfortably with them. Captain

Mullins was more delighted with his home at every trip, and thought aunt Madeira a paragon of management. The children grew less boisterous and selfish in their ways, and the toning down of their outward roughness seemed to have a corresponding effect upon their faces. They would never be lovely, but each countenance came to have a charm of its own, the intangible prettiness of refinement and an atmosphere of affection.

Busy and happy Queenie certainly was. Madame Felix and her music were the child's great delight. After the lesson they talked, and began a little French, an Italian song now and then, and some studies that were very beneficial, if not of the most practical order. Yet her thoughts and aspirations came to have a much wider range than if she had been confined to a school routine.

And yet her busy brain was occasionally haunted by a vision of something different. A home the like of which had not as yet shone on her path, the tenderness of a mother, the pride of a father, gay, girlish companionships, brightness, beauty, and a peaceful gliding away of days so happy, that just to anticipate them lent a strange and starry radiance to her lustrous eyes, and deepened her cheek with a soft rose-hue.

And so Queenie came to her fifteenth birthday. She had grown considerably during the year, and looked taller than she really was, with her slender, shapely figure. Her beautiful hair had grown again, and was more abundant than before, still preserving the wonderful golden tints of her childhood. She was not unconscious of her beauty, though she seldom thought of it save in a glad, exultant way, just as she rejoiced in the sunshine, or any good and perfect gift of God.

What would the future bring her? What work was she to do? Something quite beyond this narrow round. She laughed gaily as she went over housekeeping matters with Miss Madeira, who rejoiced to save a little here to

meet the increased expenditures there, and whose whole soul was in these every-day affairs.

Thanks to her economy captain Mullins was out of debt, and prosperous. For the first time since the birth of the twins he felt himself a free man.

And now a new opening came to him, the charge of a trading vessel bound to Australia and the Indies. The salary attached was higher, and there was an opportunity of sharing the profits that was not to be lightly passed by.

"I should be gone from one to two years," he explained to Miss Madeira, "but I think I could be spared better now than at any other time. The children are still small, and there would not be so much anxiety about them, and between you and Queenie you do manage them beautifully. Their poor mother—" and the worthy captain paused, wondering in his heart what made women so different—"she hadn't the health and the nerves, you see, and they were all so little. It would be a great comfort for her to come back and just see how pretty and well-behaved they are—it does one's very heart good. So if you don't mind too much, I'll take charge of the Linlithgow, and make a little money, and when I'm once fairly ahead in the world I might find some opening that would keep me at home regular when the lads and lasses were growing up to be men and women, and wanting a father's hand."

After discussing the matter, with all its pros and cons, it did appear too favorable to let slip. The owners, Hardham, Jenkins & Co., East India traders, were very much in earnest, and finally the parties came to a settlement. On the first of July he was to start. Miss Madeira was to draw her monthly allowance from the firm, not stinting herself, but being economical, as she always was.

"For to tell the truth," she said somewhat softly to Queenie, "it does seem as if poor sister had been rather wasteful in some things, and she brought up to save and

be careful, and having a good deal of her own to start with, and dying in debt as one may say. I'd always had an idea that the captain hadn't much judgment, but we don't look for men to have, when their part is to earn the money, and he's that easy tempered, you may see for yourself, and one man out of a thousand. And now we'll just do our best so that he can get a little start, and it'll all come back to us fourfold as the Lord has promised, and far as I can see, though there ain't any glasses to look into the future, the children are hearty and strong; for to have one of 'em dying on my hands and he away would about finish me."

But Queenie was to be grandly rewarded for her love and patience. Two or three days before his departure Captain Mullins sent home a piano.

"You deserve it all, and more too, and if you wouldn't mind teaching Moppet a bit, — the little witch coaxed this out of me, pretending it was for you, as if I couldn't see through it! And you must not think it exatvagant, auntie Madeira, though to tell the truth I couldn't spare the money to pay for it out and out, but the balance doesn't come due till next January, and then I'll be a little forehanded. And now you must be as happy as larks until I get back."

The children promised they would be the very best children in the world, and write to pa as often as there was a chance. Queenie kissed the kindly, weather-beaten face, and smiled with tears in her eyes. How good he was! Not quite the papa of her dreams, but she loved him nevertheless, with all her grateful heart.

They felt very sad at first, but childhood is too buoyant to grieve long when the future shines brightly. And there was the wonderful piano, on which they all wanted to play, even down to the twins. Moppet, as was to be expected, put on so many airs and graces that Pug teased her unmercifully, and the school-girls laughed and quizzed

her; but it must be confessed she held her ground very well.

Much trouble as they were, they hardly gave the anxiety that Tip did. He was sixteen now, a well-grown, passable lad, but he seemed to have great trouble in getting fitted either in a round or a square hole in this busy, bustling world. School he hated, always had for that matter, though he was a smart, bright boy, who picked up bits of experience that stood him in stead of education. He had been in sundry offices and stores, and there was always a plausible reason for a change.

His wages, which were never very large, he spent upon himself, principally in car-fares, lunches, cigars, and amusements. Auntie Madeira had been much shocked when she first learned that he smoked, and his father had sternly forbidden it, but it merely made the youth careful at home. True, while his father was in port he behaved with considerable circumspection, and though the lad had not set his heart upon evil, he only wanted to "be like the other fellows."

When his father was out of sight and hearing again he began to allow himself a little more latitude, staying out nights and going off Sundays. Queenie used to coax, with her bewitching assumption of womanliness, and sometimes she won, and would keep him home listening to her singing and playing, and persuading him to invite in his boy friends, though some of them rather shocked her. But she seemed to understand the danger more readily than Miss Madeira. She had seen it, indeed, though she put by that strange and painful experience like some terrible dream.

Then an incident occurred to divide her interest. The husband of Madame Felix had a stroke of paralysis, which left him entirely helpless, though his mind was unimpaired. A good-hearted German woman came in to nurse him, but he used to get so weary, and it seemed just now as if

Madame was busier than ever. Queenie was always ready to go in and read, or amuse him, sometimes taking the twins, who had grown into quite cunning specimens of babyhood, and not the least entertaining was the pertinacity with which one always repeated the sayings of the other. Polly generally made known his ideas first, except about meal-time, when both were equally urgent.

But the end came at length one September evening, and the poor blind invalid opened his eyes on glories of which we know little indeed, except that we shall be satisfied. Pain, weariness, and helplessness fell away like a garment, and the soul was clothed with its new and glorified body.

Poor Madame Felix was stunned by the blow. She had watched and tended him so long that her wifely love had become almost that of a mother. Miss Madeira was much interested, and offered her store of consolation, which was tender and sweet, if quaint, and always reminded one of old-fashioned garden herbs, with their useful fragrance.

This event brought a great change to Queenie. Hitherto Madame Felix had been her only friend beside Miss Madeira, and it was a link with an experience that Miss Madeira, with all her kindness, could not understand. It had been such a pleasure to Queenie to listen to bits of Parisian life that she could almost see, because of her own strange experiences. She had told Madame Felix about Kate.

"The poor foolish woman!" Madame had said. "Could she not have been wiser? Paris is very beautiful and very dangerous, like a siren to these people who have money and not good judgment. And this new husband will spend all hers, and perhaps treat her badly and leave her, and she will go out as companion or nurse or seamstress, and maybe come back to America as a lady's maid for her passage. And if she should find you and want you again, my sweet child, do not leave your good Miss Madeira for her, who put you off so cruelly when she was rich. No, no!"

Queenie sighed. Finding Kate had been one of her dreams. True, that weak regard could not compare with Miss Madeira's affection.

But Madame Felix was to go out of her life almost as entirely. The parents of two of her pupils just growing to womanhood had resolved to spend two or three years in Europe, and desired much that Madame Felix should accompany them as a governess.

"I cannot remain at my rooms," said Madame, vehemently. "Everything speaks of my poor lost Auguste, and the long nights are intolerable. Then I should like to see my own country, and travel about, and the young ladies are extremely amiable. I shall be very sorry to part with you, little Queenie. You have been like a sunbeam, with your beautiful golden head and your radiant face. Some rich man ought to adopt you, my darling. I shall look about and find a charming papa for you, some grand old musician, maybe, who does not care for a wife, but would like a daughter."

Queenie smiled and sighed. "If you could only have known my dear Dick," she said, her eyes filling with tears.

So Madame's rooms were to let, and in about a week a new tenant took them, who bought all of the furniture that Madame wanted to spare.

"Quite a pretty young girl and her grandmother," explained Madame Felix. "I thought she was musical, as she had a piano, but I believe she is connected with the stage."

Queenie's heart gave a great bound. When Tip talked of this and that actress, or singer or dancer, her pulses would always start and quiver, and sometimes there would come an irrepressible longing to see that mimic world again.

Madame Felix said good-by to them with tears in her

soft eyes. They had made her very happy, and she should not forget them. Queenie must be sure to answer the letters she would write, and some day the child might visit her in beautiful Paris. And so passed out another friend, leaving Queenie very lonesome.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MISFORTUNES.

MADAME FELIX went away the last of October, and for a month Queenie was very busy helping with the fall sewing. Miss Madeira might be an old maid, but few mothers could plan and execute so comfortably, or with such skill, and with less absolute worry. Dresses were marvellously lengthened or turned, or furbished up anew. Patching trousers and darning stockings became a fine art, and Tip supposed those natty jackets came straight from the tailors.

Early in December Miss Madeira took a severe cold, and had an attack of pleurisy. She made a great effort to get about at Christmas, and have a nice gala dinner for the children, but she was worse afterward, with a run of low nervous fever, that kept her very weak, and made her now and then rather flighty. Then Moppet must needs get pushed down, one slippery day, at school, and break her arm.

If the bad luck had stopped there! But just then it came in a pelting shower. Queenie had been so busy that it was the middle of January before she could go down to Hardham & Co. for their monthly allowance.

"It is quite impossible to let you have any money to-day," said Mr. Jennings. "We have had some heavy losses, and hardly know what to do ourselves. Come down again in a week or ten days."

Queenie went home rather dismayed. The rent was due, there was very little money in the house, and how could she stretch it over ten days? True, the grocer and the

butcher might trust for a while ; — they had coal and flour, and that was some comfort.

“ You must not worry Miss Madeira about anything,” the doctor said. “ Such a complete state of mental and nervous prostration rarely occurs, and unless she is kept quiet and cheerful I can hardly answer for the result.”

“ Oh, you don’t think she will die ? ” cried Queenie, in sudden terror.

“ Well, I hardly think that. If it was pleasant weather I should send her to the sea-side ; indeed, a change would be the very best thing for her. Keep the children quiet, and, as I said, do not trouble her with the details of household affairs.”

Poor Queenie ! She was well, and in spite of her slenderness and delicate, high-bred air, she had a fund of strength, but all this was enough to dismay the stoutest heart. To whom could she go for counsel ? And here were a troop of hungry, noisy children.

“ But they are so much better than they used to be,” she mused, “ and Moppet really is quite a thoughtful little lady ; but there is her broken arm, which does not improve one’s temper, and if there was only plenty of money — ”

“ Me darlint,” said Peggy O’Brian, the good-hearted washerwoman, “ don’t you begin to worry now, jest. I’ve been through a-many tight time, whin I couldn’t see bite nor sup for the next day, but praised be the saints, they made an openin’ in the darkest cloud. ’An one time, whin I had three helpless little babies, as one may say, me poor Pat was brought home, scalded so the flesh dropped off of him, and lay for weeks and weeks. An’ all his long sickness at the last — but whirra ! I’m an old fool to try to brighten you with dead-and-gone troubles. Now look here, jest, I’m a little easy now, the two boys bein’ in good places, thank the Lord, and me keepin’ the won room with a handful of fire at night, but if ye’d say the word I’d come and stay here beside lookin’ after the washin’ and ironin’,

and not a cent to pay till such time as you're forehanded agen!"

"Oh, how good you are!" and Queenie seized her hand, pressing it between her dainty palms.

"There's Monday at Mrs. Gales til' four, an' Tuesday half a day, an' Wednesday here, an' the sweepin' at Mrs. Carter's on Friday. That's the big boardin'-house, an' it takes all day, jest. But there's nights and mornin's, and you ought'nt be alone, ye swate pretty darlint."

"If you only will come. It is so hard to see to everything."

"Sure I'd run me feet off for you and Miss Madeiry, an' she's wasted away to a skeleton, jest. A better-hearted woman never lived, so me darlint, beauty's not everything in this world, though it's swate enough to look at whin it's such as you, with beauty for a dozen. An' now I'll come in the night, and all the time when I'm not busy."

The kind offer lifted a load off of Queenie's shoulders, for Peggy was a great favorite with the babies. But when she went for the money she was put off again, and Peggy insisted upon her taking ten dollars of her savings to tide her over.

The doctor finally decided that Miss Madeira must go away.

"She needs something to rouse her, to change the current of her thoughts. Wouldn't some friend in her native town take her for a while?" he asked.

Queenie wrote to Mrs. Wardlow, who said, in reply, "Send her immediately."

"I must make one more effort," declared Queenie, and again went down to the shipping-house.

Alas! The news was doubly bad. Hardham & Co. had stopped payment, and there was a report that the Linlithgow had been lost at sea. She went home stunned and incredulous.

"It will never do to tell her," said Queenie, to faithful

Peggy. "And it may not be quite so bad. Oh, what would become of the poor children! And they are all improving so, and growing quite pretty. Miss Madeira meant to have them so nice when their poor father came back;" and Queenie finished in a flood of tears.

"There, me darlint, don't go out over the say to meet trouble. I've known people to come home after seven year, and everybody belayvin' 'em dead, but whirra! it's bad about the money, jest."

Then Queenie took Tip into confidence. He had not been doing very well through the winter, and business was dull now.

"And I've borrowed of all the fellows I know," confessed Tip, ruefully. "I meant to beg a little out of aunt Madeira — I say, Queenie, she has quite a pile of her own, hasn't she? She's never had anything to do but just save up her money."

"Oh, Tip! I'm ashamed of you!" cried Queenie, indignantly. "Why, when your mother was alive, Miss Madeira used to be sending little gifts, and she worked almost every day of her life at dress-making. And she hasn't much beside the house. Then she would not take any of the wages your father offered her, because she wanted to help him."

"Well, if I had it I'd do anything. But five dollars a week is such a beggarly salary, and I don't see as I can help. But you don't believe that about father, Queenie? It can't be true."

"Oh, I hope not! I pray not!" returned Queenie, with quivering lip. "For I don't see how Miss Madeira could take care of everybody, even if she should get well. You see she has worked very hard. Oh, Tip, you never can know! I want you to be good, and noble, and unselfish, for if part of this burden comes upon you —"

Tip hung his head. He was just a careless, selfish boy, intent upon his own gratification, and feeling that the world

used him rather hardly, in that it did not pour a golden shower at his feet. But to be asked to do something for others, — why, how could he ?

They packed off Miss Madeira. Queenie went with her to her journey's end, where Mrs. Wardlow met her, and then turned straight about for home. It was quite in the evening when the train returned, but Tip was watching for her, and took her on his arm with a sense of manliness and protection. How stylish and pretty she was ! And, after all, she wasn't a fellow's sister, really.

The children were in bed, and Peggy was sitting there with a bright smile of welcome.

"An' how did you lave the poor dear?"

"Oh, Peggy!" Queenie stopped to wipe away a tear. "She didn't know Mrs. Wardlow at first. She seems quite like a little child, doesn't she, dear Miss Madeira! It broke my heart t^o leave her, and, oh, if it should be some disease of the brain, as the doctor feared!"

"There, me purty pink, don't worry another stitch to-night. I've a nice cup of tay for you, and we'll lave dear Miss Madeira in the hands of the good Lord and his blessed mother. You don't belave in the Virgin, I know; but she seemed so near to us, and when you haven't a mother or a sister, or mayhap no womenkind of your own, she's dear and precious. And we won't say another word until we hear; and may the saints send us good tidings."

Queenie echoed it in her heart, but she could not trust her pale, quivering lips.

In a few days the fate of the "Linlithgow" was settled beyond any question. She had been caught in a terrible storm, and gone to pieces. Three of the sailors had been picked up, and they reported the rest as certainly lost.

And now what was Queenie to do, placed so suddenly in a position of such grave responsibility? There was a small insurance on the captain's life, but that would not

be available for some time to come. And then they were terribly in debt. The grocer had sent in his bill, the landlord had come to see if they wanted the house for another year. If Miss Madeira recovered, her fertile brain would find some way out of the difficulty; but if she did not she would need her own scanty means; and in any event she must not be troubled for the present.

"Me darlint," said Peggy, "I have fifty dollars in the bank, that I've laid up to bury me with; but please the Lord I mayn't die just yet, an' sure I'm in no hurry," with a merry twinkle in her blue eye; "an' ye shall have that, an' we'll live like princes a while longer. There's a turn in most every gale, my dear, and a summer after the winter, so don't break your sweet, lovin' heart."

"Oh, Peggy, how can I thank you! It doesn't seem right to take it, but I cannot look on and see the children starve! How odd," she continued, with a half smile; "they are no kin to you or me, and yet we are doing our best for them."

"An' the Lord'll reward us by and by. He never forgets, Miss Queenie," cried the warm-hearted creature.

It was almost like taking heart's blood to pay debts with, the young girl thought, but there was nothing else possible. The grocer and butcher were quieted, and willing to trust a while longer. But there was the rent, and what should they do if they had to move?

Queenie went to the landlord, one day, and told him the sad story.

"If we could only be sure of staying until we know positively," she said in a soft, pathetic tone. "If Miss Madeira should recover it will all be right, for she is so very honest and upright. And I do not think you would lose the money in the end; indeed, I am quite sure we would all make a great effort to pay you."

Mr. Topham was not an obdurate fiend. He was more moved by the girl's story than he would have been quite

willing to show, and her heroic courage, her brave unselfishness, touched him.

"There," he said, with a wave of his hand, as her beautiful, limpid eyes swam in tears,—"there, my good girl, do not distress yourself. You shall remain in the house; without a question, until next July; and if by that time your misfortunes prove to be of the saddest order, the six months' rent will not beggar me. Do the best you can, and I truly hope, for the sake of his little family, that Captain Mullins is not really lost."

Her gratitude was so touching that he took a few turns up and down his rather dingy office, after she was gone, and marvelled a little at her beauty and earnestness of purpose.

"The man who could be sharp with her must be a brute!" he declared, with energy. "Well, I shall not be sorry to have done that much for her."

But the dear piano had to go. There seemed, indeed, so small a probability of ever paying the balance that Queenie had not the heart to temporize. They would be allowed six months in which to redeem it, and if not done then half the purchase money would be refunded.

Queenie waited breathlessly to hear from Mrs. Wardlow. The first brief note said Miss Madeira was very weak and poorly, the second that she knew them, and now a third stating that her appetite had begun to improve, and she had shown herself greatly delighted to see some old friends. "Oddly enough," wrote Mrs. Wardlow, "though she frets now and then for Queenie, she seems to have forgotten the children, and it is quite as well for the present."

It was now early in March. The experience of the last three months seemed to have made Queenie a woman in soul, though her face still wore the enchanting radiance of childhood. Sometimes, at night, when she laid her tired head upon the pillow, the bitter tears would force their way out; but all day she was so busy, so full of per-

plexity, that she could hardly think of the heavy burden she was bearing.

And now a cruel fact stared her in the face. After all it was not so strange a matter to starve in a land of plenty. She saw the torturing possibility. *Could* they beg? Doubtless there were some kind-hearted people in the world, but she had no friend besides Peggy, who was straining every nerve, and who kept up a cheerful front. Oh, what could she do? Must she stand by helpless, when, if they could be tided over —

Was it a temptation or an inspiration? Did she have the power to save them?

The thought crept slowly over her mind, almost terrifying her. She could go back to the stage. Surely she had not forgotten all the old devices that had so enchanted the multitude. Perhaps they would be improper and absurd now, but there was the dancing. A new *furor* had broken out in ballet-dancing. A grand scenic play was bewitching theatre-goers even now. What if she —

But she shrank and trembled at the thought. Dear Miss Madeira would be shocked.

She went down-stairs the next morning, and gave the children their breakfast of bread and coffee. Peggy had gone to her weekly sweeping, and there would not be a penny in the house until she came home that evening. What were they to do for dinner? And there lay unpaid bills.

"Queenie," said Moppet, "look at my shoes, and these are my Sunday ones, too. I get my feet wet every day. And my rubbers are worse than nothing. It looks as if it might rain."

"Perhaps you had better not go to school to-day," said the sweet, grave, yet troubled voice.

"But I want to. It was so stupid staying at home when my arm was broken. And there's such a funny girl

in my class, — Lu Walker. Can't I have some new shoes, Queenie?"

"My darling, when we have a little money."

"But if pa shouldn't ever come back, and if auntie Madeira shouldn't ever get well."

It seemed to Queenie as if she must cry out in despair.

"I had better take my lunch to school," went on Mop-pet, "then I won't have an extra journey through the rain. Where is the bread, Queenie? And isn't there any cake? Won't you please give me a penny?"

"My darling, we have neither pennies nor bread;" and Queenie clasped her arms around the little girl's neck, while the tears fell on her bright auburn hair.

"Was that why you didn't eat any breakfast?" asked Cissy in an awe-stricken voice.

"Oh Queenie! *will* we have to starve like those little children in Price's alley?"

Then Queenie rose, while the group of children huddled around her like a terror-stricken flock of sheep. So beautiful was she in her youthful desperation that, as she stood there, she would have been a magnificent study for a painter.

"No, my darlings," she said, and her voice was clear and untrembling now, "I don't mean that you shall starve. God will give me strength to save you, I know. If you will all be brave to-day, to-night we shall have some supper."

If she had hesitated before, if misgivings had risen up mountain-high, if, indeed, her own aversion to stage-life as she had experienced it last of all, at the dirty, common-place Odeon, filled her with a shrinking terror and disgust, she put it all away now. This seemed the only available step.

There were, no doubt, many people in the world who would stretch out a kindly hand to save them from starving. But how was she to get at them? Could she go around asking charity? Every one had been generous so

far, but there were so many of them, and once being fed would not last forever. Mr. Topham was to wait for the rent, and there were other accounts. But the grocer had said "It really was impossible to go on trusting them. He wouldn't distress them until Miss Madeira was better, or there was some direct word about the captain. But in common justice to himself it would not do to get all his capital embarrassed, for he had hundreds and hundreds of dollars trusted out now where he didn't suppose he'd ever get a cent."

She kissed Pug and Moppet as they started for school in a quiet, awe-stricken way, tidied the house, washed the babies, and brought out their box of playthings, and asked Cissy if she would be very good and take care of them while she went out of an errand.

Then Queenie ran up-stairs, and brushed out her shining hair, smiling with tears in her eyes, for at the last she could sell that; and there was her pretty ring, and the children's necklaces. No, they would not starve just yet. Why, she might pawn some of these things; she would talk to dear, faithful Peggy about it this very night. But the other effort must be made first. A little money could be spent so quickly, as she well knew.

Which was her prettiest dress? Was it worth while to look her best, or would that bright, gay girl be jealous of her as the young ladies at the Odeon had been?

She had watched the new tenants in the rooms of Madame Felix with a peculiar interest, the slight undercurrent of association that no one else could understand, and that she could not have confessed even to her dear Miss Madeira. A nice-looking, wrinkled old person, that somehow made you think of a huckster's stand of fresh vegetables and snowy eggs, with its attendant market-woman. She went out to the store with a clean willow basket, and in a plain, gray dress and black apron, and now and then of a Sunday morning to church. The young lady was

piquant rather than pretty, medium size, plump, with bright black eyes and black hair, and smiling cherry lips. Her attire was very jaunty, with coquettish hats, stylish jackets, and dresses on the very verge of loudness; but by some happy miracle escaping it. She often went out about ten in the morning; that was for her practice; and occasionally some one took her to drive of a bright afternoon. For the rest—people in a great city know little about their neighbors.

Queenie came down in hat and shawl, and kissed the twins, promising Cissy not to stay long. Her heart beat rapidly, and her cheeks were flushed,—they had been rather pale of late. The morning was cloudy and gray, and she seemed in brilliant contrast with it.

Only a step—she did not need to ring the bell, for it was on the right hand, second floor. Up to the door, and then a modest little tap.

The young lady herself opened it. Queenie started and stood half frightened. What should she say?

“Well, who do you want, or what?” and with a careless, good-natured smile the young lady showed her white, even teeth. She was not very formidable, yet Queenie blushed and stammered—

“I wanted to see—you.”

“Oh, well, walk in. Why—” in a tone of astonishment—“are n’t you the little girl who lives in that dingy, brown house where there are so many children, and the boy that’s called Pug; and aren’t there twin babies—those you take out walking? and your name is Mullins?”

“No,” returned Queenie, with a bright flush; “my name is Barretti,” and she hesitated a little. “I am not—that is we are not real relation, though their aunt, Miss Madeira, adopted me; that was before Mrs. Mullins died, and she came to the city,” was the rather incoherent statement.

“Oh, sit down, will you? This is Mrs. Keep,—gran-ny, as I call her; for like your Miss Madeira she isn’t my

own grandmother, though she is just as good ; are you not, Gran ? I haven't a relation in the world that I know of. Gran took care of my mother when she died ; that was four years ago. Do you know, I am real glad you came in. I've often looked at you out of the window, and wished I knew you ; but isn't that thin, queer old woman a regular dragon ? What's become of her ? ”

“ Miss Madeira ? Oh, she's just the dearest and sweetest — you have no idea how good she is,” was Queenie's enthusiastic rejoinder.

“ I wouldn't have believed it, to be sure ; ” and the young lady laughed doubtfully.

“ I am glad you wanted to see me,” said Queenie, taking courage. “ I wanted to come and ask you — I am in so much trouble — ” and the child's voice faltered, while the tears flooded her soft, dark eyes.

“ My dear little chicken ! Why, this is real romantic. Do lay off your hat and shawl. Oh, what magnificent hair ! There ! I am going to put you in this arm-chair, and draw you up to the grate, and we'll talk — oh, what are you crying so for ? ”

CHAPTER XXVII.

A NEW FRIEND AND A TRUE FRIEND.

QUEENIE had nerved herself for coldness, sharp, curt questioning, and the peculiar jealousy that so often occurs between two in the same profession. Her nerves had been taxed to their utmost capacity for weeks, and latterly she had been living on the lowest modicum of food, this morning gone altogether without her breakfast. Her reception was so different that the friendliness quite overcame her, and before she knew it she was sobbing on the other's shoulder.

"Oh, don't cry so, my dear, don't! Why, you are real hysterical! And you're all of a tremble! What *has* happened to you? You have not been turned out of doors by that sharp-nosed dragon, have you? No use to tell me she's sweet and good; I haven't lived nineteen years in the world for nothing, and have cut my eye teeth; I know a thing or two. You shall stay here, and we will see. I rather enjoy fights, and generally come off first best, I can tell you. Oh, my sweet, pretty little thing! Here, drink this glass of wine. It's as simple as water."

Queenie drank it, and smiled through her tears; then, obeying a sudden impulse, kissed the friendly face bent upon her with so much interest.

"It isn't that; she *is* good, but she is sick, and has gone away, and Captain Mullins is lost at sea, — at least, that's the news, — and the firm his money was with has failed, and we are almost — starving. And I came to see —"

"My dear, you have come to a bad place, with a ven-

geance! I could help you a little, but I live up pretty close, don't I Gran?" and she laughed gayly.

"It isn't that, altogether," Queenie interrupted, flushing scarlet. "It was to see if you couldn't help me, or tell me how to do something—stage-dancing. I used to dance—on a tight-rope."

"You!" and the other stood off a little to look at her. "Well, now, if this isn't funny! And you are right in the profession! Now tell me all about it. When did you begin, and where were you?"

"May I tell you all?" Queenie asked, timidly. "It is a long story."

"Oh, I'm just wild about romances and experiences. I don't like to read, but I could sit all day and hear any one talk; and people do have such queer stories and adventures,—especially in the profession. So begin;" and she knelt playfully before her.

Queenie wiped away the traces of tears. The wine had given her new strength and courage.

The commencement attracted her hearer's attention at once,— "I was lost when I was a very little girl,"—and held her spellbound, though she could not forbear sundry interruptions and questions. Gran, too, sat down in the circle and listened.

"Well, if this isn't the strangest thing! I've heard of Queen Titania, too, I'm sure; but land alive! I hear of so many things and people! I've always been on the stage, and my mother was there before me. Gran took care of her in her last sickness, and then we went on living together; it's more respectable, ain't it Gran? But I keep pretty straight, though I do like a good flirtation; and when there's a chance I shall marry, but none of your stage gentlemen for me! I've heard about that Chippenham, and he's a half-baked poet and genius, just one of the men who never do anything but swindle, their whole lives through. Wasn't the woman a fool! My dear, if I had a fortune I

wouldn't marry the best man that walks. I'd flirt right and left, for, after all, none of 'em are true to you, and if they were I'd get awful tired. But as I haven't the fortune, when some nice, solid party gets spooney about me, I shall bring him to the point, and hook him while he's in the humor, and then he can repent at his leisure. And so you want to go on the stage, and I guess it is about the best thing you can do. But land alive! you don't mean to take charge of that whole raft of young ones! Why, you are crazy!"

"Miss Madeira has been so good to me! And I like them all — and I have no one —"

"You sweet little angel!" and the vivacious hostess kissed her rapturously.

"Then Miss Madeira *will* get well if there is not too much bother and trouble; and if Captain Mullins is lost, there is a life-insurance; but it is just now that we need money, and if I could help —"

How wistful and earnest the limpid, brown eyes were! The whole face was alive with that peculiar bright hope, and seemed enchantingly beautiful.

"Well, I don't see why you shouldn't make a furor, if it was properly managed; but you don't ask me what I'm doing."

"Are you dancing or playing?"

"A little of both, my dear. I shall shock you, no doubt; but I'm in that wonderful spectacular play, 'The Enchanted Princess.' Everybody thinks it dreadful, and yet the whole world rush to see it, as if they had lost their wits. The play isn't much, but the transformations are just superb, and there are no words to describe the dancing. I get bewitched about it myself. I'm in the dance of the fairies on the lake, and the house is so still you can almost hear a pin drop. Such bouquets! such lovely little suppers, and everybody going wild about you! I don't believe there ever were so many pretty girls in one play before. And

several of them have had *bona fide* offers of marriage. I like the life, the fun and excitement. But you are very young."

The clock struck twelve at that moment, and Queenie sprang up.

"Oh," she cried, "I must go! I left Cissy with the babies, and I didn't think to stay —"

"And I haven't said half that I want to. I wish I could keep you to dinner. Must you go? Will you come back afterward, or will you let me come in and see you? I am quite curious about that houseful of children."

"If you will come in, I shall be glad."

"Yes, I will, good and early." Then she paused, and gave a little, embarrassed laugh. "Were you wanting anything? Be honest, now. Here is five dollars that I can let you have just as well as not. And I'll talk to Madame Denzil to-night. She's jolly good-natured, and no meanness about her. Oh, I should just like to do something for you."

The money was crushed in Queenie's hand, whose fair face became scarlet, and her breath almost strangled her.

"You will surely come?"

"Yes, you little darling."

Queenie ran down the stairs with a light heart. The rain was pouring now, but she did not mind it as she picked her way to the nearest grocery and purchased some dinner for the children. She found the house in an uproar. Cissy was standing in the street door, the babies were crying as if they were undergoing a scalping process, the fire was nearly out, but in spite of all, Queenie's spirits rose. Her newly-found friend had been so sweet and cordial.

"And to think that I do not even know her name!" laughed the child; "because of course it isn't Miss Keep."

Cassy and Polly had a hearty meal, and felt better natured, and they were all bright enough when the visitor

entered. Indeed, Cissy wanted to play hostess quite to the extinction of Queenie.

"It's so odd and funny," exclaimed the guest. "I wonder they don't all call you little mother, as Maggie did little Dorrit. You are quite sure you weren't romancing this morning? I can't make it out that you've been on the stage. But Mrs. Keep remembered Signor Barretti and Queen Titania. You don't imagine this Owen Thomas would put in a claim, do you? although I think I should have a new name."

Queenie inquired that of her new friend, and found it was Florence Fay, though she admitted that in reality it was Florence Smith. She brought with her a programme containing a brief description of the acts, in which she figured as Firefly. There were nymphs and naiads and mermaids, and every romantic and grotesque character under the sun, it seemed. Tip, who never had a sixpence for any one else managed to see the new plays, and considered himself posted in actresses. He had been wildly enthusiastic over the Enchanted Princess, and talked of it so much and so admiringly, that Queenie now felt almost as if she had seen it. And Miss Fay expatiated on the elegance of the dresses, the beauty and style of the girls, and the fascination of the dancing.

Theatre-goers had been a little wary at first, then were taken by storm and capitulated. There was not much sense or dignity in the play, — the Princess Silver, who, through the first part of her life, was closely guarded from the influence of a malign fairy, fell in her hands when least expected, and earth, air, and sea were searched for the lost heiress of a princely house. There was a brace of rival lovers, a false friend, in love with one of these, and the scenes, it must be admitted, were admirably managed.

"I don't know but I might smuggle you in behind the scenes," said Miss Fay. "And I will talk to Madame Denzil, — she is mother to the princess, and real jolly and

clever. Now keep up heart, and if there is any way to crowd you in I'll work my very best to do it. You're so pretty, that's in your favor. And dancing on the boards is pleasanter work, to my fancy, than starving off of them. By, by, little pet. Look for me in to-morrow. Oh, there's a matinee at one! Let me see, suppose you come in about ten, instead. Now I must run home, and take an hour's beauty sleep, for I was up early this morning."

She went off laughingly, waving her hand. Queenie put on the kettle, and wondered how she could best explain to Peggy her new acquaintance and the borrowed money. It was quite dark when the faithful creature came in, laden with parcels, as cheery of voice as if she had been out on a holiday.

Queenie only said, "I managed to get enough to keep us through the day, but her face flushed an uncomfortable scarlet. Cissy had to talk about the sweet lady who came in, and who talked and laughed so much, and Queenie explained that it was Miss Fay, their neighbor. There was supper, and bustle, and Pug tormented the twins, as usual, and Tip came in with his big-boy swagger, and what with getting the younger ones to bed Queenie had hardly time to think, only she felt very tired, and a good deal excited.

Would anything come of it? If she only could earn a little money. And there was nothing else. She could not be spared to tend in a store, or to sew, and at either the wages were a mere pittance. Yet she shrank unaccountably from the stage. Its lights and glamour could not warm her into one ardent, pleasurable desire, but need and courage roused her instead.

She went into Miss Fay's promptly, having hurried with her work.

"Oh, you dear creature!"—and Miss Fay kissed her rapturously,— "the funniest thing has happened; you really couldn't guess, and you're to go down with me; you must be all ready at twelve. I've found an old friend of

yours, and you'll be just the luckiest girl! She's dying to see you. How delightfully puzzled you do look! It is as good as a play."

"An old friend," replied Queenie, thoughtfully; "it isn't, it can't be, Mrs. Chippenham."

"No. You were telling me about her, though, — some one you liked, and who was very good to you. When I told her, she was just frantic to see you, and now guess."

Miss Fay's face was full of merry mischief, while Queenie's was puzzled to its uttermost.

"Some one I liked," she repeated, slowly. "There was Dolly St. John, — oh, it is she, I know. I see it in your face."

"Yes — Madame Denzil. She married Pet Denzil, the biggest flirt in Christendom; but she knows it, and she isn't a bit jealous, so they get along. He's one of the Princess' lovers. And when I said, last night, 'Did you ever hear or know of a little acrobat and dancer named Queen Titania?' she just went wild, though she declared that you had died in a hospital, and nothing would convince her, she insisted, but actually seeing you. Why, it's just the queerest thing, — but I described you so perfectly that she *had* to believe; and now, my dear, run home and put on your store clothes, and take down your ravishing hair, and come straight back, for there is no time to waste."

Queenie caught the spirit of the adventure. How kind Dolly St. John had been to her in that dreary time when Owen Thomas first became her master. There was no one beside Kate that she should be so glad to see, for Maggie had faded into a dim dream.

She went home and made a partial explanation to Peggy, who was very much afraid that it was a plot. "And what would the children do without her? and poor Miss Madeiry, when she came back? and theaytres were dangerous things, no good ever coming of them; but thank the Lord it was

daylight, and if she came home before dark, she, Peggy, would believe then that she was safe."

Moppet begged to go, too, and Cissy cried, but Queenie presently tore herself away from the bedlam, and found Miss Fay waiting for her. They walked out to the corner of the street and took the horse-car, and Queenie sat almost breathless, wondering how it would be to meet Dolly St. John once more.

Palace Garden had been repaired and refitted, and was now considered quite a gem of a theatre. When the Enchanted Princess was first brought out the house was crowded, of course. Every one wanted to see in order to judge; it was unfair to condemn until you had seen. The actresses were mostly young and pretty, the ballet corps entrancingly so. The manager had been once ruined by the legitimate drama, and he felt that he must retrieve his fortune. And now he was in a fair way to do it. The place was crowded nightly. There might be something a little questionable in the dressing and the dancing, but the play had no immoral points. The songs were delicious little bits, the scenery simply magnificent, the tableaux and transformations wonderful! They did, indeed, hold the audience spell-bound.

The two girls disappeared through a rear entrance, and threaded their way in and out of dim passages to the green-room, which was very fairly appointed, and thronged by fairies, princes, peasants, nymphs, imps, and various creatures of earth and air, in glittering and diaphanous drapery, satin tights, spangles, and tinsel. There were pretty faces and trim figures, lithe, shapely limbs, dainty feet and ankles, and all the purely physical material that goes to make the modern half-burlesque a success.

There was Queen Charmante in her crown. She turned and took a step forward —

"How late you are, Fay," she exclaimed. "And you've

brought her! Come right in the dressing-room. It surely isn't — Queen Titania? Why, child!"

And that was Dolly St. John, a rather stout woman now, what with late suppers, wines, and delicacies. She took Queenie by the shoulder and drew her toward the flaring light.

"You just get into your rig double quick, Fay. Why, you've grown," this to Queenie, "but I should have known you, I'm pretty sure. You've the same wonderful eyes, with their velvety softness, and oh, your hair is still golden! Why, I can't believe it! Thomas said you were sick and died in a hospital. Aren't you a bit glad to see me, child?"

"You were so kind to me — I've always remembered it," Queenie said, in a tremulous tone. "And do you know where he is?" looking around furtively as if Thomas might pounce down and claim her.

"Who, Thomas? Gone to the dogs!" with a careless laugh. "He has come to the gutter stage. But I can't believe it," studying the fair face. "Will you swear that you are no impostor, you lovely little midget?"

"I surely am Titania," was the response.

"Fay was telling me the strangest jumble, but I suppose it is all true. You were a little nun, then, and wouldn't have told a lie to save your head. And so you want to come back to the stage again; but you do look too sweet and innocent! And yet, if you were a clerk in a store, men would think you fair game for insolence, and you can keep good if you try. Many a one does, in spite of all the howl that is made. There's the call-bell. Sit down and be comfortable. I shall be off in the next scene, Addio," and she floated away, arrayed in golden tissues and sparkling jewels.

Fay was transformed into a coquettish shepherdess, and with ribboned crook in hand, waited for her turn, improving the time by a running talk to Queenie, and then she

brought her out to a nook in the side-scenes, where she could have a view of the stage.

How strangely familiar, and yet how bewildering! Again, for a moment, she was dainty, delicate Queen Titania, being held in Dick Bridger's strong arms. His tender, encouraging kiss was on her cheek, and all this tumult of applause was for her,

During the next scene Madame Denzil carried her off to the dressing-room, and the whole time was spent in conversation, going over the past that had been so strangely eventful to Queenie, and yet changed her so little.

Queen Charmante introduced her to a number of the actresses, and to several of the actors, her husband among them. It seemed an endless mass of confusion, crowds in gauzy drapery rushing hither and thither, music of the mad, daring, bewildering order, songs that were gayety itself, and oh, such dancing! Never had Queenie seen anything to compare with it. Her pulses beat in riotous tumult, she held her breath and wondered.

And as she was standing there, her cheeks all aglow, her eyes, great lucid lakes of entrancing light, her fair hair like a sea of gold about her, Madame Denzil brought up the manager.

"There, isn't she a beauty?" she asked, in a whisper. "And she can't have forgotten her training. It would soon come back to her. I never saw her equal as a child."

Queenie turned, and a bright color suffused her face, while the enchanting eyes were wistful and eager.

"My dear, I want to introduce you to Mr. Ritchie. Miss Barretti, my dear manager. Now you had better secure your prize," she went on, with a light laugh. "You can put in a special dance for her and get everybody else by the ears. I ought to have seized upon some traps and attired her gorgeously, that you might see her make up, which would be just ravishing."

The manager studied her from head to foot. A rarely

handsome girl, and even in her plain dress he could see the pliant grace of her figure.

"You think you could dance, Miss Barretti?" he asked, in a pleasant tone.

"Oh, to that music, and where everything is so beautiful—" and it seemed as if every feature quivered with excitement.

"Suppose you hunt up something and try her. We're full enough, but first-class talent seldom comes amiss. Now if she could rival Mademoiselle Zelig—" and the manager drew a half-thoughtful, half-questioning pucker in his open brow.

"Why, I am sure she could. See here—let me put her into something, and just try her in that fairy-ring. Then you can judge. And she might be able to fill Mademoiselle Zelig's part to the satisfaction of the audience. You see if she doesn't stop here she is likely to go somewhere else," said Madame Denzil, who was desirous of doing all she could for her old-time favorite.

"Well, you may try her in that fairy-ring. Did you ever have a touch of stage-fright, little one?"

"I used to be afraid, first, of the flying leaps from the gallery to the stage, and then the pedestal-dance seemed so terrible. I am sure I couldn't be afraid on the floor," Queenie replied, with a touch of shy grace.

"What was the pedestal-dance?"

The child described the great feat of Owen Thomas' management.

"And you did that? Then your nerves are steady enough for anything! Why, Denzil, that idea of a dance in the clouds might be possible, you see! Yes, rig her up as quick as you can. Where's Kitty Dean? She carries the key of the property-closet. There, I must run."

"My pretty pet," said Madame Denzil, "your fortune is about made if you have any mother-wit. I want you to dance your very prettiest in the fairy-ring, for Ritchie will

be watching you like a cat. It is odd to go on without a bit of a rehearsal, too, but the success will be so much the greater. Kitty! Kitty Dean!"

A rather stout, pleasant-faced woman answered the summons.

"Hunt me up a costume for this girl, — the very prettiest there is. You see," turning to Queenie, "there isn't much, any how, — only odds and ends, to use in case of an emergency. Is that my call? Oh, yes. I'll be back in just five minutes. Go to my dressing-room with the things;" and Madame Denzil disappeared.

Kitty obeyed, wonderingly.

"Haven't you any wardrobe of your own?" she asked, eying the new comer sharply.

"Not here," was Queenie's quiet reply.

"Oh! Well, this is the best I can do. Charmante can put some pieces of ribbon together with a pin, and make a costume out of it. I never saw her equal. And she's main good-natured. Not many women would let their husbands go round making love to other girls, and he younger, too, and a handsome chap. But somehow he doesn't seem to get out of love with her, and maybe the rest is all fooling. She's cute, I tell you, is the Denzil. She can twist Ritchie round her finger, and there's nothing like being on *her* right side. Zelig hates her good, and she, you know, just laughs at it. But it's my opinion she'll give her a back-hander some day, when she won't know who struck her. I'd help you dress, only I don't know just what she'd like. You've been on the stage before, of course. What in?"

"Fancy dancing," replied Queenie, with a little hesitation.

Then Madame Denzil came flying into the room, crying eagerly, "Not a moment to lose. I must have you made up in a trice!"

It was well for Queenie that she had no time for consid-

eration. She was out of one garment into another; she was hustled about, turned round, a pin put in here, a stitch taken there, her beautiful hair brushed out until it was like a misty cloud about her, and then Madame Denzil called loudly:

"Ritchie! Ritchie! come here and see a veritable fairy!"

Queenie flushed as his eyes ran over the scanty drapery. Certainly, for beauty of form and lissome grace she might have been born a Greek nymph. As she stood there so bashfully there was not an awkward line about her. The slim figure, the daintily-flushing complexion, the fine waveness of her silken-soft hair of palest gold, the exquisitely-flexible rounding of the form, which betokened grace and agility, caught the manager's eye at once.

"Now, if you don't get frightened and awkward!" and he began to explain the scene to her.

"Queenie, if you make one poor or weak movement I will never forgive you," whispered Madame Denzil, — but she kissed her fondly for all that.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AMID THE LIGHTS.

THE lights were low; there was a sweet, wandering melody, "viol, flute, and bassoon," the winding trill of French horns, the soft, wary piping of the cornet, and all the air seemed throbbing with rhythmic waves.

Beauty and fashion were plentifully sprinkled among the audience. Elegant and exclusive mammas, who were not quite sure that it would be proper for young men to bring their daughters in the evening, allowed themselves to be persuaded into chaperoning them at a matinee. Young wives, with rather foggyish husbands, lured, or teased, or cried them into the indulgence. It was a trifle naughty, perhaps, but it was so magnificently beautiful, so entrancing! And after all there was ballet-dancing at operas, and no one thought of staying away. A past generation had gone wild over Vestris, Taglioni, and Celeste, so why should one be horrified at these girlish dancers?

The stage, too, was in a dim, suggestive light. There was a lake, with its shadowy edges, a greensward, looking like velvet. Out of the purple and twilight sprang a group of figures, — fairies, indeed, in gossamer robes, — Peasblossom, Cobweb, and Moth, surely; Water-lily rising out of the rushes; wood-elves springing from cloven pines. How noiselessly they trouped over the stage, making the most bewildering figures and poses, and each one, at intervals, doing an enchanting little aside, as if she were dancing solely for herself.

Queenie joined the group timidly. She was not afraid,

and yet a strange hesitation came over her. But the music was delicious, inspiring; the flashing, gauzy figures brought back a touch of the old glamour, and when she had once begun she seemed like one bewitched. All the old passion and grace and daring came to her aid. The power that had held others enchanted began to enchant herself.

"There, I told you!" exclaimed Madame Denzil, in triumph, just behind a side scene.

"She's a born dancer!" laughed Ritchie, "but then she has had some magnificent training. Barretti was a remarkable acrobat. And, Denzil, why couldn't we have that cloud-dance? Zelig wouldn't risk her precious limbs, of course, and she's much stouter. I wish she would go farther front—" and this referred to Queenie. "Can you whisper to her? I am afraid I should make her nervous."

Madame Denzil whispered that and something more. And then to Queenie came one of those sudden, daring impulses, on which the pivot of many a fortune has turned. There was an urgent pecuniary need of her being a success, there was also an earnest desire on her part. The enchantment of season and scene began to work with her, and it seemed once more as if Dick Bridger was there with the tenderest of caresses and sweet praises. She was Queen Titania again.

Out farther in widening, mazy circles, floating as if on air, the twinkling feet scarcely touching the floor, the pale hair a halo of scintillant lights, the brown eyes humid and glowing, yet with a strange softness in their fire, the white arms gleaming and describing the most picturesque of curves above her head, across her bosom, and in the perfumed air. She caught the figures, partly from the others, partly from her past experience, but the most beautiful of all were a present inspiration. Nearer and nearer the footlights, her pure white drapery, with very few gauds, giving her a wonderful wraith-like appearance, and then she paused a moment, in so startling a pose that she might

have been a flying nymph suddenly transfixed by sight or sound unknown to others.

The vast audience held its breath an instant, and then there was a storm of applause so sudden that it startled her, woke her out of her impassioned dream, and she seemed to float away like a spirit. Indeed, she ran panting, and full of vague fear, to Madame Denzil's very arms.

"Why, child, it was wonderful! You've carried Ritchie captive. Mademoiselle Zelig had better look to her laurels. There, you will have to go back. They are calling you."

"Oh, no, no!" and Queenie clung to her friend.

"Don't be foolish now. Audiences won't stand that sort of thing. They insist upon having their appreciation appreciated in turn. Come. You are not frightened. It was exquisite."

"They are calling you!" cried out Ritchie, impatiently. "It won't do to miss such a hit as that. Hurry her on again. It may be worth a fortune to her."

She needed money so much, poor Queenie! Not for herself—and all the sweet, helpless arms seemed to cling to her at once, all the dear faces look at her with their imploring fondness. It was the fortune she wanted, but the applause was the royal road to it.

"May I have a little drink of water?" she asked timidly, "and then I will be ready."

Madame Denzil kissed her in the old enthusiastic fashion of Dolly St. John. There were some calls amidst the applause as she hurried out again, and was rapturously received.

What did she do before? She had almost forgotten. It was as well perhaps, for the freshness of her figures entranced the audience anew.

"That's the divine art of dancing!" exclaimed Ritchie, rubbing his hands. "Zelig's has a good deal of the can-can about it, but this is the pure poetry of motion. Why, I do believe I could look at her an hour myself. She

makes you think of some radiant flower swaying in the wind. Denzil you have discovered a star!"

The curtain fell at length amidst enthusiastic applause. The audience looked at their programmes and began to whisper. "Some one quite new!" "What a lovely being!" "It was *not* Zelig I tell you—she would make two of this girl." "What wonderful feet and ankles!" and so on.

Queenie was quite exhausted. Mrs. Denzil shut the others out of the dressing-room, and there was a shrill call of names for the next scene. Fay was besieged. Who was she? Would she take Zelig's place? What magnificent training! What a pretty girl!" And there were some jealous dissentient voices. It was not in human nature that they should cordially welcome a rival.

She lay on the sofa in the dressing-room in a strange flutter. The unwonted violence of the exercise seemed to have taken the strength out of every nerve and muscle. Madame Denzil threw a soft wrap over her and ran away, and for some time she was left quite alone. At this point of the play the whole troupe were needed every moment, hardly allowed time to dress for their parts, indeed.

But after a while the enchanted Princess had been found and restored to her home, the rival lovers had fought their way through flood and fire, the villain falling into a trap laid for the other, the hero winning his beautiful bride, the king and queen and a grand procession following. Then there was a last magnificent transformation scene, the princess and her lover sailing over the lake in a glittering barge. All the shore was lined with marvellous bloom. Here lay a fairy asleep in a lily-cup, there, between a cluster of roses, peered out a nymph or a cupid. Every bud you looked at seemed to turn into something rare and strange, with a beautiful human face, while Pan piped among the reeds.

Madame Denzil was not in this, and she flew to the dressing-room.

"My dear child," she began hurriedly, "I am going to give you a bit of advice. Ritchie is decidedly smitten with you, and you can make yourself all the rage. But money is the great thing in this world. No doubt he will offer you twenty dollars a week —"

"Twenty dollars!" cried Queenie, in a tone of joy. "And all for dancing a little while every evening! Oh, Madame Denzil, it would be a fortune!"

"You little goose! Hold yourself high and others will hold you so. You see you don't need to begin at the bottom of the ladder, among the rank and file who expect to make the best use of their pretty faces and trim figures, and maybe catch a husband in an unwary admirer. You have made a decided hit, and then you have the prestige of being Queen Titania. And, child, you haven't any idea how marvellously beautiful you are. There's that Helene Duprez — all he hires her for is her pretty face, for she dances like an elephant. And here is Mademoiselle Zelig, who does not lower *her* prices any, I assure you. Why, I suppose if you had a mind to take up the old performance you might get fifty dollars a week."

"Fifty dollars!" Queenie's face was one stare of astonishment.

"Yes. Do you know that Owen Thomas had to pay one hundred dollars a month for you. And I've never forgiven that woman for hiring you out when she had so much money. Well, I just want to enlarge your sphere of wisdom. When Ritchie comes to talk business, you tell him that, what Thomas paid, I mean, and ask him fifty dollars. You'll end by getting thirty. Don't come for a cent less than that. And see here — you won't care about being here again to-night?"

"No, I cannot," said Queenie, "there is so much to see to this evening. And, oh, I *must* go home. They will all be so worried."

"Oh, it isn't late. Well, I was saying — you offer to

come on Monday night, and dance, and if you are a success, which you will be, of course, then make your bargain. Don't be jewed out of a fair price. There are girls dancing here for ten dollars a week; well, perhaps it is as much as they are worth, but don't you begin any such work. And do not tell a soul what you mean to ask, even that clever little Fay. There's Ritchie."

Madame Denzil began, suddenly, in the midst of one of their Canadian experiences, which Ritchie interrupted.

"Miss Barretti," he commenced, "could I see you on Monday morning, here at the office, say? I should like to have a talk about business."

Queenie looked wistfully at her companion.

"Why, child, you are old enough to make bargains for yourself," said Madame Denzil, laughingly. "Don't appeal to me in that frightened way. Come down and see Mr. Ritchie, he is not quite an ogre. Is Fay going to take you home?"

Miss Fay made her appearance at that moment.

"Miss Barretti," she exclaimed, "I am not going up home. I seldom do after a matinee. But I'll put you in the car —"

"Why not stay down?"

"Yes," said the manager. "Try us again to-night. If you like to see part of the play in one of the boxes —"

"I am much obliged, but I cannot. They would feel so worried at home. And I had better go," glancing around with shy entreaty.

"Well. Don't let any one else spirit you away, and we will settle our business on Monday morning. Good-day; but it is almost evening, isn't it?" with a cheerful laugh.

"Give me your address. I want to see you to-morrow," whispered Madame Denzil.

She wished them good-evening, and withdrew. How odd it seemed to come out to daylight. She stared around, in odd uncertainty.

"It seems as if I must have been in there half the day and all night, and am just waking up."

Queenie rubbed her eyes as she spoke, and as they turned the corner a sudden gust took them.

"The gaslight, and all that, in the daytime. I say you're just splendid, you are! Why, I wouldn't have believed it. Half a dozen of the girls are ready to eat you up, without a grain of salt. It makes me laugh to see them go on so. I'm not jealous, though I might be about a lover," reflectively. "And I don't care for the mere dancing. I aspire to playing, as well. But won't there be a nice row to-night with Mam'selle Zelig!"

"Why was she not here this afternoon?"

"Oddly enough, the Saturday matinee was left out of her agreement, though Ritchie declares he spoke of it, but it isn't in the bond, and she will not come without extra pay. But her especial admirers are out in greater force in the evening. She's one of the stunning sort, and gained an immense reputation in some opera bouffe at Paris. Here's your car. Good-night little chicken. You may consider an engagement sure, for Ritchie is struck with you."

Queenie stepped into the car, pulled her veil over her face, and no one remarked her, though it seemed to her that every one must know that she had been dancing at the matinee. It was quite dark when she reached the well-known corner, and she ran fleetly down the street.

The children were around the table, and each one uttered a cry of joy, interspersed with sundry ejaculations. The babies must kiss her, and Cissy gave her a rapturous hug.

"Tip was going down to the theatre after supper," announced Moppet.

"And you've really been to Palace Garden!" exclaimed Tip. "Isn't the Enchanted Princess immense!"

"Why can't I go?" cried Pug.

"Could you get any of us in? Could I go?" was Moppet's eager question.

Peggy was frying cakes. Now she spoke up.

"Do let the poor child alone, with your worryin' her like a badger. Take off your hat, Miss Queenie, and have a good cup of tay. An' wasn't it out till now, or were you with the young lady?"

"Oh, I've so much to tell you that I hardly know where to begin. Yes, the play was beautiful; and oh, Tip, I danced, actually, in the fairy-ring, and was applauded, so that I had to come out and dance again. I don't know, I felt as if I was bewitched. The lights and the music, and the crowd of people."

Her eyes were glowing, and her cheeks scarlet, while her pretty ripe lips quivered.

"Oh, Queenie, you're just too beautiful for anything!" cried Moppet, admiringly, catching her hand, and giving it a squeeze.

"The holy Virgin save us!" ejaculated Peggy, turning a cake off the griddle on the floor.

After a long while the story seemed to get told in detachments, with many wondering comments.

"But what I am thinking of," said Queenie, her sweet face all aglow with a tender light, "is the money. I hope it isn't wicked to be so mercenary. Twenty dollars a week, and it won't be less than that; think what we can do! And you may have some shoes, Moppet, and there will be no more going without lunches, and scrimping, and we can pay back Peggy, and all the other bills; and I am so happy, so very, very happy!"

There Queenie broke down with a nervous crying fit. Every one of the noisy group was fain to rush and comfort her.

"Get away! get away," said Peggy, authoritatively. "Let the poor lamb drink her cup o' tay, and have a bite. She's dead tired out, what with all your clatter. Not a

word now. If you're not as whist as mice sure every sowl of you'll go packing off up-stairs."

That peremptory mandate restored order and quiet. Queenie was too excited to eat, but she glanced at them all and smiled, while Cissy declared that Peggy was a cross old thing.

Tip had been very silent, studying Queenie with a sort of amazement, and thinking some new thoughts that had never entered his mind before; thoughts that, strangely enough, were destined to bear fruit all the rest of the boy's life. The rough outside burr had been pierced.

He came gravely around to Queenie, stooped and kissed her, and began huskily, while a tear shone in his eye, —

"Queenie, you *are* an angel, and I'm a great selfish booby! I don't deserve anything. I ought to be kept on bread and water, and — and — well, I don't know what is bad enough to happen to me. Here you and Peggy have been slaving yourselves to death, borrowing and scraping and running in debt, that *my* brothers and sisters shouldn't starve. And I haven't minded — oh, it's been beastly cruel in me! I've just gone on and had the best."

Here Tip broke down and sobbed on Queenie's shoulder.

"Why does not some one scold me?" he went on, angrily. "Oh, if pa ever does come back, Queenie, or if I live to be a man, I'll work my finger-ends off for you. I've been a lazy, good-for-nothing fellow."

"Oh, Tip, dear, don't," and she was crying again.

"It's been very, very hard. Yesterday we wouldn't have had any money only that nice little Miss Fay lent me some — lent it without asking, either. Oh, if we only can get out of debt, and not have to go on credit, and if auntie Madeira gets well —"

"I'm main afeared of theaytres lamb," said Peggy, coming around the other side to caress her; "but it does seem as if the saints had opened a way. I was thinking this very day, whatever should we do to keep out of 'sylums and

poor-houses, and here it's all made plain; but I hope there's no wrong. I mind when I was a girl at home yonder," — nodding her head, — "many's the time I've danced on the green with my skirts kilted, and been none the worse. Ah, but I loved it, too; an' weddings an' christenings were big things. An if ye will ye can keep good anywhere, an' I pray for ye night an' mornin'. An', please God, we'll see some better times. An' won't the Madam — what d'ye call her — take a motherly care over you?"

"Queenie," said Tip, "I wonder if you'd like me to come for you every evening? I could do that. You are too pretty to be out in the streets alone at night."

"Oh, Tip, that would be so good of you," she returned, gratefully.

"See here, Queenie, I'm going to turn over a new leaf. I can't talk much about it, but you will see."

She kissed him very tenderly.

Cassy had fallen asleep over his supper, and they were all astonished to find how late it was. So the dishes were washed, and the children put to bed. Tip did not go out as usual, and amazed Peggy by offering to bring up some coal.

But last of all, Queenie and Peggy sat up until nearly midnight, discoursing on what theatrical life was like, the simple woman being astounded by the girl's larger experiences.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FOR LOVE'S SAKE.

MADAME DENZIL and Miss Fay had advised, and Queenie, not being altogether ignorant on the subject, had been able to make a very good bargain,—what she considered a fortune, in fact,—thirty dollars a week for the first month. Then there appeared bits of notices here and there about the new star in the Enchanted Princess, Mademoiselle Zanfretti. They had stood quite a while over the old name, Queen Titania, but the child herself preferred a new stage appellation. Just now, of all times, she wanted no one to claim her. If she could only take the household through these perilous straits!

She was a success from the very beginning, appealing to the higher phases of art for her triumph. Her wondrous beauty and grace, and her sweet, entreating innocence won hearts that turned from Mam'selle Zelig with disgust. And Ritchie was wise in being chary of her. She, so intent upon doing her whole duty would have danced every moment of the time; but the manager knew better. He liked to whet the appetite of his audience. They followed the programme to see when she appeared, and greeted her with delight. Bouquets were showered upon her, and cards began to be sent to the green-room.

There were heartburnings and jealousies that this young stranger should make such rapid strides in public favor; but she bore her honors so very meekly. If she rivalled them in art she cared nothing for their admirers, and was not anxious for any of her own.

And then came the best of news from Miss Madeira.

She was gaining health and strength rapidly, and her mind was clearing. The doctor had every reason to hope for a permanent recovery, but he wanted her to remain some time longer in the country.

What a proud and happy girl Queenie was when she began to pay off the family debts. They lived very frugally, and Peggy insisted upon doing all she could. Queenie had her days for household matters, always returning home at night as speedily as possible. And there was Tip, punctually on hand, to guard and attend.

A great change had come over the youth. No one but himself knew how hard he was struggling to emulate Queenie's unconscious heroism. He was prompt at his business, he chose the simplest of lunches, and allowed himself but one cigar in the evening. It did make a difference, he found. The true spring of manliness had been touched in the boy's nature. It pained and shamed him that this stranger to them, until so lately, should be working for his brothers and sisters, and out of these pangs grew a sturdy independence.

The last of April Miss Madeira came home. Oh, what a joyful festival it was! Something had improved her strangely, they could hardly guess it was the few pounds of flesh she had gained. She was still very plain, to be sure, but the children kissed and caressed her, and to them she looked more than beautiful. They laughed over her queer, disconnected sentences; they had to take her in every room, and show her every new article. The twins brought a pile of broken playthings and laid them at her feet.

"But how have you lived all this time?" she said, wonderingly, to Queenie. "I mean, my dear, where did you get any money? And to think I have had no more sense than a baby! There was a little in the bank, — money I mean, — and there ought to be a bank of good sense in this world, but I'm afraid every one would want to draw, and

no one deposit, and poor brother-in-law gone, for we've never heard nothing, and what we're to do I don't know; but I have a little, and I'm sure I shan't grudge a penny for poor dear sister's children, looking so bright and well."

Then Queenie had to come to confession. Miss Madeira listened as if to a romance, interrupting with astonished comments.

"And now, dear Miss Madeira, you are not to worry about anything. Peggy will go on living with us, to help do the work, and she declares she will not take a bit of wages, since she has three days in the week to herself. She has been so good to us all; I can never tell you the half, dear auntie Madeira, only I could not have lived without her. And the children are all so nice; Moppet is quite a little woman, and Tip is just splendid. I feel as if he was my own big brother."

Queenie paused, out of breath, her face suffused with a beautiful flush of tenderness.

"And you are dancing at a theatre, — making all that money! My dear, I've sewed early and late, and saved and pinched, but I never could make that much money a week if I died for it. Why, it's wonderful! If a body could be quite sure;" and she looked up questioningly. "There was the daughter of Herodias —"

Queenie laughed, and colored rather sensitively. The dear old wrinkled face was so full of perplexity.

"I think it is better that I should do this than that we should starve, or be separated, and have to live on charity. And though there are some girls that one wouldn't want to associate with, there are others who seem so kind and generous, and who are working bravely to take care of families, and it seems to me as if such people just glorified their work. When you are there, with the lights, and the wonderful music, and the applause, why, you feel as if there had never been anything so beautiful, and you could dance on and on. And I always come straight home. I don't wait for

the little suppers, and Madame Denzil is so good. She manages that I shall not see the people who crowd in the green-room for introductions. If only Mam'selle Zelig, — but then it might be too nice."

"Well, I can't say, to be sure. My poor, dear father would have thought you on the high road to perdition if you went to a theatre. But you're just as near an angel as can be, — there now."

The thorn in Queenie's life was Mam'selle Zelig. When she found this little girl, unknown and unheralded, was dancing her way so rapidly into public favor, she hated her bitterly. The gay, careless part of the troop did not so much mind so long as Queenie refused herself to all admirers. True, they sneered a little about it, said she set up for a saint, and called her Miss Hightoned Morality; but it mattered little so long as she did not hear it. Miss Fay would gladly have drawn her into her gay circle, and, indeed, did one day inveigle her into a dainty lunch at her own house. There were but two gentlemen, Mr. Danforth, Miss Fay's present admirer, and a Mr. Harry Grenville, a handsome young southerner, who, after besieging everybody, right and left, was fortunate enough to persuade Miss Fay to promise him the coveted introduction.

Mr. Danforth, Queenie had met some time previous, and she recognized in the stranger a persistent habitue of the green-room. The half-terrified, half-upbraiding, look she gave Miss Fay only provoked a laugh.

"I have trapped you, my shy little bird," she whispered, mischievously, but Mr. Grenville plead so hard, and Fred took pains to find out all about him, and he is really unexceptionable. Now don't be cross. I would do anything in the world for you."

Queenie's nature was so fresh and sweet that it would not have been possible to assume coldness, or appear ungracious. Miss Fay set herself about conquering the light frost of reserve, and she did it successfully. Her small

parlor looked its prettiest, adorned with flowers. Miss Fay possessed a French woman's art of adornment. The curtains were plain Swiss, but beautifully draped, and a basket of colored foliage hanging at each window. The somewhat worn furniture had pretty delicate covers, rather as drapery than the stiff excuse for neatness. A few well-chosen pictures, some brackets and vases, the open piano, and a general air of comfort, indolence, and pleasure, pervaded the apartment. Being rather long, the table was daintily set at the rear end. After the first strangeness of introductions was over, Mrs. Keep came in quietly, removed the cover, added a few dishes, and the quartette took their places.

They were young, gay, and bright, and had a merry time, as refined as that in many a more stately mansion. The jests they told were wholesome, the experiences they compared were those of youth. Harry Grenville could have paid no greater respect to the visitors in his proud southern home, under the eyes of parents and grandparents. Indeed, the stately old Mrs. Grenville was a great stickler for the courteous etiquette of a past generation, and this, her favorite grandson, had been raised not only in the elegances of refinement, but with the strength and manliness of true chivalry, — that gracious word so fast falling into disrepute through the various shams that have overlaid it.

Queenie could not resist the kindly atmosphere. She was at home in it, of course; indeed, it seemed like a bit of her past life floating over to her again. She warmed and brightened, grew lovelier with every word, every smile, and Miss Fay gave wise little nods to Danforth.

Grenville was under a spell, certainly. He had indulged in a few mild flirtations at home, but this was wine to that flavorless water. And he said to himself that he had never seen so beautiful a girl. What witchery lay in those large brown, velvety eyes, shaded by the long lashes of a

more golden hue. The fine, clear skin, flushing at a thought, the dainty chin, the curved lips, with the tint, softness, and fragrance of a rose, the cloud of golden hair, the exquisite grace of every movement, — ah, what a pity she was only a stage dancer!

They lingered over their lunch with entertaining conversation, and had just risen from the table when a coupe with two stylish gray horses drove up to the door.

"Now we are to finish with a drive in the park," announced Danforth. "It is just the day, and we shall have the best of the sun. Ladies, put on your wraps, for though it is May, it is not quite summer."

Queenie demurred a little. They would be troubled at her long stay from home.

Miss Fay overruled. Mrs. Keep should run in and tell them. There could be no real objection, and surely she had not the heart to spoil their day's pleasure. The vacant space would throw a chill over the party.

Then Miss Fay brought out a ravishing white felt hat, with a pale-blue plume, and insisted upon Queenie's wearing it. The child looked like some high-bred princess. As they drove through the winding avenues more than one person turned to glance at her. The homage embarrassed her. And then she laughed softly to herself. Over yonder she had trundled the twins in a baby wagon, with Cissy clinging to her skirt, and Pug anxious to get into a fight with any boy of his size.

It was a glorious day; too early in the season for nature to don her witcheries of bud and leaf, but there was a stirring fragrance from the evergreens, and the long sweeps of grass had stolen softly into emerald brightness. How glad the world was! How many happy faces looked into hers, and she was happy, too! The dark winter that had so crushed her seemed ages ago. She was coming to something wonderful, intangible, and yet full of happiness. She felt it in every bounding pulse, in every breath she drew.

Why, it was delightful just to live! Ah, how she should dance to-night, after having had this entrancing day.

It was almost dusk when they reached home. Queenie ran up-stairs to change her hat.

"If I wasn't the best-natured girl in the world I should be jealous," laughed Florence, gayly. "Every one has stared at you as if you were a new specimen of woman-kind, and I don't wonder. You are as lovely as a picture! If I had your beauty —"

She had heard it nearly all her life. Even simple and strait-laced Miss Madeira paid homage to it with fear and trembling. It was so plain a fact that it touched her no more than if any one had said, "Your eyes are brown," or "your hair is gold."

"Well, what then?" she questioned, eagerly.

"Why, I'd make as great a stir in the world as some of those famous women of history, or legend, or society. Why, you could set yourself up as a little queen, not taking in the rank and file as Mam'selle Zelig," and Miss Fay gave a scornful smile, "but the higher class. You could have rides and suppers and little fetes, and make yourself of so much importance that managers would be bidding for you. I'd not stay out of sight, as a modest daisy. And you can see for yourself that Grenville is quite gone over the bay, lost his head. He's been badgering every one for a chance to see you. Denzil is a capital dragon, though I wonder she hasn't insisted on your coming to her. And she has no end of fun; but she's older, and married, and has more license. And I'm on the lookout for a good chance to marry, or I should sail in."

"I must go!" and Queenie ran away with glowing cheeks. Why should there be any such thing as love and marriage, while the world was so fresh and sweet? And why should one think of selfish gifts and gains, and value friends for what they brought?

The children clung around her with a clamor that would

have been deafening to any one else, and surely startled fastidious Harry Grenville. Where had she staid all the long afternoon? Cissy would never like Miss Fay again, never;—not even if she brought her loads and loads of candy, and a splendid wax doll with real hair! For she had no business to keep Queenie so long, and Queenie never staid home with them now, and —

But Queenie was telling Miss Madeira about the lovely drive, when Moppet cried out, —

“Oh, I saw you! I saw you! And you had on Miss Fay’s beautiful white hat, and you looked magnificent! I was out on the avenue buying a spool of silk for auntie Madeira, and you flashed by. I knew Miss Fay, but oh, wasn’t it funny that I didn’t know you? Dear Queenie, won’t you buy a white hat with blue velvet and a beautiful blue feather, and —”

“Let me eat a little mouthful of supper, and then I must be off. Have you all been good children, and not worried auntie Madeira? Yes, Polly, I won’t forget to kiss you, and you shall have the wagon some day —” when the debts are all paid, she was about to add, but checked herself.

It seemed as if the little crew would never get done kissing her. She was seldom impatient with them, though sometimes their caresses had to be shortened. Tip was never home early enough to see her to the theatre, but she often went with Miss Fay, as she had engaged to, this evening.

The children had been rendered wildly happy by the indulgence of a matinee, and now Cissy’s great ambition was to have a lovely dress, and dance on the stage, just like Queenie. Miss Madeira shook her head gravely.

Were they all to go on, and be dependent upon Queenie’s exertions for their chief support? She often thought it over. Would she dare begin dress-making in a great city, where style and fashion overwhelmed one? And the pittance she could earn, even with Queenie’s assistance,

would be so small. There was her little cottage in the country, but if they went thither Tip must be left alone to struggle with the temptations that beset homeless youths. Could she even take care of the others, then? and the poor woman would shake her head slowly.

Tip and she used to talk it over sometimes. The big boy was getting to be such a comfort to her, so thoughtful and sensible. He had improved so much that his employers had raised his wages a dollar a week; but what was eight dollars to that great crowd! And so they went on, trying to be hopeful.

There had been some talk of changing the play, but the house was still crowded, and the manager making money. But Queenie knew, in any event, she would not want for an engagement. She did not trouble herself about the future, but just lived in her art and in the present.

Queenie found, in making that one exception to her strict seclusion, she had opened the door to numerous invitations.

"Though I really don't see why you should make such a nun of yourself," said Dolly Denzil. "If you adopt the stage as a profession, and you can make money no other way as easily, you can hardly help coming in contact with your fellow-creatures. Your youth and inexperience shield you a good deal here, but it is bad in another way. It makes enemies for you. Women begin to hate the one who seems to stand on a higher pedestal of goodness than the others. Not that I should want you to go down to Zelig's level," with a scornful shrug. "And yet, in her world, she is a success. She lives elegantly, has a carriage at her command, shines in jewels and satins, and will, no doubt, lay up a snug sum of money for old age, unless matrimony overtakes her. She is shrewd and keen under that loud, lawless exterior."

Queenie shivered a little. She had felt the stings of enmity.

"She won't ask you to join *her* circle, never fear. Such women cannot tolerate a rival in society, nor in their pleasures," laughed Madame Denzil. "And the farther you keep away from them the better it will be for you. But you might come to me now and then without a fear. I should have the same care for you that a mother would. And some of my friends are dying to see you, as well. Let me see; I think you must come to my next little supper. You may be sure of meeting none but nice people. And if Pet makes love to you, laugh at him. He has an idea that his destiny in the world is to be continually making love to some woman."

A few evenings later Madame Denzil announced that Queenie was to go home with her immediately after the play.

"You had better remain all night with me, I think, unless you would much prefer returning home," she said.

"Oh, I should, dear Madame Denzil! They would all feel worried, I know. And — my brother will come for me."

"Don't call that great stupid boy your brother, when you know he isn't! No, I shall send you home in a hack. Don't look so frightened, as if you were going to be hung! You really must get this bashfulness rubbed out of you a little. It's odd that you shouldn't mind a great theatre full, and that one or two people can put you in a tremor."

Madame Denzil laughed gaily, and pinched the rosy cheek, so exquisitely soft and clear.

"But the crowd is always so far off," she made answer. "You seem safe from them."

"And yet the people near by seldom eat you up. They like *pates* and *meringues* better. What have you in the way of dress? Nothing, I'll be bound. How funny that you should be working for people who are no kin to you!"

"But Miss Madaira was so good to me," was the grateful reply. "And they need me."

"Pooh, child! *I* would have been as good again if you had fallen into my hands. Queenie, I wish now that I could adopt you, and order all your ways. I would be better to you than that fool of a Madame Barretti. Come. Why not leave this raft of poverty-stricken young ones —"

"Oh, Madame Denzil, I couldn't, indeed I couldn't," and Queenie's eyes filled with tears.

"There, you little goose, do not cry about it! But you know there are other people in the world who would be glad to have you. I sometimes wish for a daughter of my own, — never a son, men are such humbugs! If it wasn't for the troublesome, idiotic babyhood, and the risk of not having her handsome. So, Queenie dear, you'll know where to find your next mother when you want one."

Queenie kissed her tenderly.

"And now about the dress. A pretty, light-blue silk, for you *are* a young lady, although it seems difficult for you to believe the fact. And I can't have you giving up every penny and going in hodden gray."

Queenie trembled at the expense. Her new month's pay would take them all out of debt except the rent, get the children some clothes, refill the barrel of flour, and replenish the coal. How could she take so much for herself!

"I had something in my mind," Madame Denzil explained, a day or two after. "I have a friend who is going in mourning, and who will dispose of her wardrobe for a mere song. There is just the dress you want, and it will not need much alteration. No, I won't hear a word. You are to come and spend the day with me, and have it done."

It would be ungracious to refuse, and it certainly would be unwise to vex so good a friend. So she yielded to Madame Denzil's imperious sway, and acquiesced in her arrangements for the supper. And that, Queenie was forced to confess, was absolutely charming. There were but a dozen guests. The drawing-room was a study in itself, quaint and Bohemianish, with luxurious chairs, pic-

tures, statuettes, bits of old china and bric-a-brac. And the supper-room was just perfect with its glass and silver, its flowers and lights. There was a refinement and elegance, and also a brightness of wit and intellect, that had been quite beyond Kate Bridger's reach, something that money rarely buys.

It was a glimpse of the life that Queenie was fitted to enjoy with a very thorough zest. How had it come? she asked herself. She listened to the gay repartees, the bits of wit and wisdom, saw the play of the lights and the dazzle of the silver, and breathed the fragrance of the flowers. It was like poems she had read. Or had she seen it all in some pre-existent state? And she wondered now about her parents; had they been poor, or was there something in that early life that left its impress?

Mr. Grenville had succeeded in obtaining an invitation, and was devoted to the beautiful girl. Indeed his infatuation was no secret at Palace Garden. But she managed to dispense her attention with such a gracious equality that no one could feel hurt. However, Mr. Grenville had the delight of attending her home, which made amends for the smiles bestowed upon others, and was to him the most exquisite pleasure.

"Read this!" exclaimed Madame Denzil the next evening. "L—— is considered a very elegant theatrical critic, and this must be pure admiration. I wanted him to see you, but I had hardly dreamed of such a result."

Queenie read it with glowing eyes. A most delicate tribute to the charms of Mademoiselle Zanfretti, to her marvellous stage-power, the exquisite perfection of her art, her modesty and childlike innocence, and predicting a brilliant future for her.

Madame Denzil nodded her head confidently.

"You are making a reputation rapidly," she began. "I do not suppose this 'Enchanted Princess' will last forever, though Ritchie means to finish out the season with it.

Then you will want a new engagement, and every little thing helps. Are you going to be just absurd enough to cling to these Mullins people all your life?"

"How can I leave them, now —"

"You have the most ridiculous conscience that I ever saw, child! I hope some day they will all be able to take care of themselves, though if you are going to waste your youth this way I hope some handsome young fellow succeeds in captivating you. Anyhow, I mean you shall have a fair chance."

It was a perilous path that opened before Queenie. Her youth, her capacity for enjoyment, her strange, changeable past that, in the nature of events, could erect no barrier save the purity of her own soul, the violent sundering of ties, and their arbitrary replacement, were illy calculated to develop a symmetrical character.

Could she even stem the treacherous tide? What if her little bark grounded on the bars and shallows of the shining stream, or, striking some rock, should go down suddenly?

Yet her aim gave her a high and noble courage. For them she was to strive. For them she was to shun dangers and allurements, lest she might bring disgrace on her good work. A household strangely stricken, yet, through her endeavors, scarcely feeling their loss.

CHAPTER XXX.

THISTLES THAT BROUGHT FORTH GRAPES.

It was the last week of the "Enchanted Princess." Lent had fallen earlier than usual, and it seemed as if, after Easter, the city had taken a new lease of gayeties. Hotels had been thronged with people coming and going, suites of rooms had been kept until the very commencement of summer, a late opera season had flourished, a remarkable tragedienne had been presented, but through it all the gorgeous scenes and fascinating ballet had held its own.

It is true there had been some difficulties of management. Once, indeed, Mam'selle Zélie had stirred up such a disaffection that the play actually quivered in the balance. The real cause had been Queenie's appointment to sing a little song, that was rapturously encored. Some one discovered her beautiful voice, and Ritchie was glad to make the most of it.

Party spirit ran high, and party lines were sharply drawn. Matters were compromised somewhat by a promise of benefits, that were wisely appointed for the last week.

Queenie had declined making any engagement for the summer, partly by Madame Denzil's advice, and partly on account of Miss Madeira's pleading. They were out of debt, and had a little money, and Queenie was beginning to show her work. There had been more dissipation latterly, invitations that she hardly dared refuse, though, with the utmost carefulness, she had made enemies by her very exclusiveness, and none more bitter than Mam'selle Zélie.

Among the *habitués* of the green-room Queenie had one

evening recognized Archibald Winstead, with extreme terror. Fortunately all remembrance of his mother's little handmaiden had passed from his mind. Two events had recently befallen him of much greater importance than any old memory. He had been expelled from college, to the great grief of his mother, and he had come in possession of a fortune, bestowed upon him by an unwise maiden aunt, who might better have left it to his sister. Mrs. Winstead had aspired to the management of it, but the young man shook her off coolly, and went his way after the fashion of prodigals. Mademoiselle Zelig tolerated him, and accepted his presents, of which he was rather lavish, while Queenie repulsed the slightest overtures for an acquaintance. Indeed, she confined herself so closely to Madame Denzil's dressing-room, which being small was left mostly to that personage, that very few were able to gain a moment's chat with her. Then she had a trick of slipping out so quietly, under Tip's protection, that she was often gone before Miss Fay was aware. Indeed, they seldom went home together, for Miss Fay delighted in little suppers and a crowd of admirers.

Monday evening proved quite an ovation. Queenie disappeared in the midst of the confusion, and with faithful Tip wended her way homeward. Miss Madeira was waiting for her, and kissed the tender, flushed face. Queenie threw herself on the sofa with a tired air.

"I am so glad you are going to have a little rest," said Miss Madeira. "You ought to go to the country. Mrs. Wardlow and Hetty would be so glad to take you in, and there's Mrs. Burgess; but I should miss you so, and yet I wouldn't be selfish."

"The idea of auntie Madeira being selfish!" laughed Queenie.

"You are as good as gold, that's what you are!" declared Tip, enthusiastically. "You and Queenie might just have stepped out of a story-book."

"Hark, what is that!"

The sound of a carriage stopping, and an authoritative ring at the door. Tip answered it.

"Here's a note for you, Queenie, and the man is to wait for an answer. He asked for Miss Barretti," said Tip.

Queenie opened it wonderingly, and glanced over its contents.

"Why, how odd," she began. "It is from Madame Denzil, and she wants me to come immediately—to a little party. The carriage is to take me, and will bring me home, and I am to wear my prettiest dress: 'come in full dress,' she says, 'and make myself look as pretty as possible.' I wonder why she did not tell me? It must have been an afterthought."

"But you won't go," observed Miss Madeira.

"It must be something especial for her to send in this manner. I am too tired, really, but I should be sorry to disappoint her. And the carriage was to wait!"

"Why, I would go," said Tip. "Why shouldn't you have your share in the nice things? She must want you very much or she would not have sent."

"And she has been so kind!" Queenie gave a little sigh from fatigue, then she roused herself immediately. It would not take her swift fingers long to change her attire and brush out her beautiful hair.

"Yes," she continued, "I had better go."

The slight languor enhanced her beauty. She was innocently proud of herself in her pretty blue silk, with its soft laces, the Pompadour neck displaying her lovely white throat. Taking some white roses out of a bouquet, she caught up part of her golden hair and fastened in the cluster. Ah, what a picture of radiant, entrancing girlhood!

"Had I better go with you?" asked Tip.

"It is hardly worth while," she said, after a moment's consideration. "You would have the long walk home alone. Good-night, auntie Madeira. Go straight to bed."

"I'll take a doze on the sofa until you come back. Oh, Queenie, how beautiful you are! I hate to let you go. I envy those people who can look at you and talk to you."

She stooped and gave him a kiss, and then fluttered out to the carriage. The clocks and bells were striking for midnight. She stepped in, the door was snapped with a click, the driver sprang on his seat, and rattled away. Then she thought how very strange it was. But they clattered through the deserted streets, and the jolting vehicle seemed to scatter her thoughts. Indeed, they were all chaos when she was handed out, and led to the foot of a strange, broad stair-case.

"Madame Denzil?" she questioned, anxiously, surprised at the unfamiliar aspect.

A waiter in a white jacket escorted her up-stairs to a dressing-room, where a sleepy looking French maid sat in attendance. Queenie threw off her wrappings, drew on her gloves, wondering as she followed the waiter across a hall. As he opened the door a glare of light dazzled her.

"Miss Barretti," he announced.

She stood motionless, breathless. The great chandelier over the table showed a group of strange faces the first instant. Four women among them, as many again of the opposite sex. There was Mademoiselle Zelig resplendent in garnet velvet and diamonds, her white bare shoulders gleaming, and her round, bare arms loaded with bracelets. And there was Rose De Luce, about whom a scandal was openly circulated. Where was Madame Denzil!

All eyes were turned toward the lovely apparition. She was so transfixed with a slow, dawning sense of mistake, and a terror creeping over her made her lips seem dry and constricted, her tongue dumb.

Mam'selle Zelig gave a loud laugh, and let her great, cruel black eyes wander around the table.

"Gentlemen," she said, mockingly, "to which one of you are we indebted for this surprise? Miss Barretti's

exclusiveness is too well known to suppose for a moment that she appears here at midnight, unattended, an uninvited guest."

The young girl's face was crimson, and every limb trembled as if she would have fallen.

"Madame Denzil" — she stammered.

"Madame Denzil would hardly be likely to attend a *petit souper* given in *my* honor," was the reply, with a scornful laugh. "Neither would she be invited, I am happy to say."

The soft eyes dilated with apprehension, and the pale lips quivered without a sound. Then with a great effort she cried, wildly —

"There is some mistake! I was sent for by Madame Denzil. The driver brought me here —" and she paused in a strange whirl, confused beyond belief.

One of the guests rose courteously:

"Since you are here you will be persuaded to remain and grace our banquet with your presence. Mam'selle Zélie, come to my aid with your eloquence."

"Of course she will remain," was the mocking answer. "Midnight revels are pretty much the same, and you can imagine it at your Madame Denzil's. Gentlemen, make room for the pretty prude of the ballet, who assumes the shyness of the violet, but in whom you will no doubt find the ripeness of the peach, the richness of the rose."

There was a dainty burst of applause, mingled with confusion. Several gentlemen sprang up, and now the young girl saw one face that was not quite a stranger, yet so hatefully familiar that she drew back in desperate terror, and springing frantically to the door, fled to the dressing-room.

Archie Winstead followed her, and remained standing at the door.

What had happened Queenie could not understand or make plain in any degree. That she had gone wrong some way — yet the hack-driver had not shown the

slightest hesitation, the waiter had seemed to be expecting her — oh, what was it? How had it come about?

She hurried on her wrappings with trembling hands, and bounded to the door like a frightened fawn. Her face was ashen pale, her soft eyes wild and startling.

“You will not go home alone this time of night unattended, surely? It is a very singular rencontre, but your friend will no doubt be able to explain it all. Allow me —”

Whom could she trust? She tried to collect her shocked and scattered senses. Every thought shrank in repulsion from this young man. Yet she was in a desperate strait.

“Could you — find a hack?” and her voice was strained and hoarse with alarm.

“I might — yes. Remain here a moment. Nay, do not be alarmed. You look as if you would faint.”

“I shall not faint,” she replied haughtily, drawing away her hand. “Will you see, or shall I apply to a policeman?”

He disappeared, and she stood just within the door, her heart beating in great frightened bounds. Past midnight — worse than alone, for she knew not whom to trust, nor what lay before her. Where was she? Would it be of any avail to ask the stupid maid? Oh, if dear Tip were but here, with his rough, boyish bravery.

She heard the laughter from the room opposite, and her cheek burned with unwonted shame. Was she the subject of their jest? Ah, it was well she did not hear the cruel, shameful insinuations of Mam’selle Zelig, that it might be but a cunningly devised plot between Winstead and the pretty dancer, springing from pique and jealousy on her part. Little did she, or even they, guess that Mam’selle had been playing into Winstead’s hands, with a touch of her own secret malice.

“I have found a carriage,” was the announcement barely whispered in Queenie’s ear. “Allow me to conduct you to it.”

She went hesitatingly down-stairs. There stood a vehicle.

"I am much obliged," she faltered. "Believe that this has been some terrible mistake, and accept my warmest thanks. Good-night."

She sprang in thinking she had dismissed him. He said a word or two to the driver, and then, before he was fairly in, they had started.

Her former terror returned a hundred fold. Her first impulse was to utter a wild scream, but she restrained herself with a great effort.

"It was not worth while for you to leave your party," she exclaimed coldly.

He had been drinking freely; indeed, Archie Winstead had been leading a most irregular and lawless life for the past three months. He had fancied, and still did for that matter, that money was the great motive power in pleasure, at least. It had brought him the smiles and society of pretty girls. He had been a good deal piqued by the studious coldness of this one, but now he had a fair field, and meant to take advantage of it.

"My adorable girl," he made answer, "do you suppose anything could be a substitute for your society? You are so coy and shy—" and he grasped her small hand, while his hot breath seemed to scorch her.

"How dare you!" she cried angrily.

"Don't be so tempestuous, my pretty one! After watching and waiting so long, kindly fate has at last thrown this opportunity in my way. I should be a fool to let it slip!"

In his estimation a dancer was public property, and a fair prey at all times. Some other would clasp this pretty, slender, shrinking form to his breast, some other would kiss the fragrant lips. Nay, had not Zelig sneered at the purity of this lovely girl as a convenient masque, to be put off and on as the whim seized one!

An unutterable loathing and horror sped through her

slight frame, and her small hand clinched itself, as if but waiting to strike a blow. She felt his breath warm upon her cheek, with its lingering fragrance of wine; she saw his dull eyes aglow with fierce, selfish desires. She was alone here with him. Was there no escape? Better the street and the tender mercy of some stranger, if no policeman were at hand.

Suddenly every sense woke to a startling acuteness. She pushed away the face so heated with revelry, and the madness of what he would have profaned by love's name; she shrank into the corner, while outside she slipped her arm, unseen by his eyes.

Where was the knob of the carriage-door? and she felt with frantic eagerness.

He leaned over with hateful words, ready to seize and half stifle her if she dared to scream, longing, yet hardly daring to snatch a kiss from the quivering lips.

A sudden wrench, with almost superhuman strength, and the carriage-door flew open. They were passing a dimly lighted, quiet hotel, and the driver half turned to avoid another vehicle. She would have sprung out at full speed, so wrought up was every nerve, but this moment's halt was auspicious. Out she flew with a wild cry, half stumbling at the feet of the other midnight traveller.

"Good Heavens!"

She righted herself, gathered up her robes, and turned toward him her beautiful, imploring face.

"Do you know if I could find an officer —"

Winstead was beside her, his hand upon her arm.

"This lady is —"

"I know the lady very well;" and Harry Grenville's voice rang out clear and sharp. "She is entitled to my utmost courtesy and assistance. What! Winstead —"

Archie Winstead slunk away muttering an oath, but he could have murdered his rival.

"Oh, Mr. Grenville!" Queenie cried, "did God send

you to me in my peril? It is all so strange. Mr. Winstead has been drinking, and —”

“The dastardly scoundrel! You should not have trusted yourself to him an instant. But fool and braggart as he is I hardly thought him capable of such disrespect to a lady. And now — will you allow me to escort you home?”

“I shall be so thankful,” she returned, tremulously.

“Will you take my coach? I had just returned from a dinner-party.”

“Is it far? Where are we? I think I would rather walk;” and she shuddered at the sight of the coach.

“No, not very far. Are you clad warmly enough. Yes, you had better ride — in this attire, too. If you would rather, I will send you alone; but it would be a sore disappointment to me.”

“If it is not too much trouble,” — she said, hesitatingly, — “if, indeed, you would not mind going.”

“Mind it! You could not give me a greater pleasure;” and the frank, earnest face glowed with delight.

Then he assisted her in, and they drove through the deserted streets.

“I ought to make some explanation,” she began.

“You need not, to me, unless you desire it. The fact of Winstead’s behaving so like a scoundrel is sufficient apology for your preferring a stranger instead. But it was not a stranger, thank Heaven. Oh, Queenie!” he cried, suddenly, with a change of voice that terrified her again — “if you would only give me the right to watch over you and guard you! You are too young and beautiful for the perils of stage-life, and — I love you! I have loved you since that day I first saw you at Miss Fay’s, nay, before, even. I have watched you night after night, and envied those who surrounded you, who might touch your hand and glance into your eyes. You have held aloof, and I respected your isolation. You have refused me the privilege of a visitor, and yet I have not learned to unlove. Queenie, you will never find a truer, stronger regard.”

"Oh, hush, hush, she cried, in pain. "I cannot listen to you. I am only — I know the distance between —"

"There is *no* distance between. I know what you have feared. Queenie, I shall not say one word to wound or pain. I ask you in all good faith and honor to be my wife. Leave this hateful stage —"

"No, no," she interrupted. "There are so many things that I cannot explain. Oh, why did you say this!"

"Because I wanted you to know that my love could bring no pain nor shame. Because I want the right to take you away from here, to put you in your true place. Ah, you do not realize how rarely beautiful you are. You are rightly named. I look at you sometimes and think you are truly a little queen. Oh, let me crown you! Let me set you where you will be admired and respected."

The carriage stopped. She glanced out at the well-known place, and a long breath of relief escaped her.

"You have been so kind, such a true friend this night; and you trust me so! You have not asked how I came to be in such peril! But it would be cowardly and mean to take advantage of your — your —"

"You do not take advantage. I give you my love."

His arm was around her, and he lifted her out tenderly. In the darkness his lips just brushed against her cheek.

"If I have been cold and distant," she cried with sudden heat, "it was because I felt that I was not only poor and obscure, but a dancing-girl. I have seen your family at the theatre, — your mother, your stately and handsome grandmother, and your two sisters. Do you suppose they would welcome me in their midst? They would think you had disgraced yourself irremediably. They would disown you. I wanted to believe that you were too honorable to say what it would be a shame for me to listen to; and you will see, you must know, that it would not be right for me to take you at your word and promise — no, I could not bring that trouble upon you."

"Then you *do* love me," he exclaimed, exultingly. "It was because you thought of that, you sweet, foolish, noble girl! Well, we are rich and grand, all we Grenvilles, and have some pure old blood in our veins; and, somehow, you make me think of the old family portraits, among the women. Why, you are more beautiful, and as grand as any of them. And they cannot help loving you! I am the only grandson, the last Grenville in the line, and it shall go hard with me if I cannot marry whom I like. But you are tired, and tremble like a poor frightened bird, and I must stay no longer. Good-night, my darling. You will not refuse to see me to-morrow. I shall be here in the morning."

He rang the bell, and the hall-door was opened. One lingering, passionate kiss he pressed upon her lips with his murmured adieu, and was gone.

"Was it nice?" Tip asked, rubbing his sleepy eyes.

"I will tell you about it to-morrow; it is so late."

Tip locked the door, and lighted another lamp, and with a kindly good-night they separated.

Queenie took off her pretty dress, that had been such a delight to her. Should she ever like it again? How could this awful mistake have come about? And then the cruel, sneering face of Mam'selle Zelig rose up before her. Oh, if her stage life could but end here, for now it was hateful to her. The charm and romance had suddenly faded to glare and tinsel, and whispers, that made her cheek burn, even in this solitude.

Strangely enough she never once thought of the escape offered that night. Harry Grenville might have questioned her love if he could have looked into her heart.

His brain was steeped in delicious dreams; and he wondered a little how she came to have so much the style and manner of his sisters, who had breathed an air of cultivation ever since they were born. And she living in that mean old house, a stage-dancer!

CHAPTER XXXI.

A BRAVE LOVER.

TOWARDS morning Queenie fell into a troubled slumber, and slept late. When she came down Moppet was putting on her hat for school. The table had been cleared, but just at one corner Miss Madeira had spread a tempting breakfast.

"Oh, you dear darling!" cried the child. "Auntie Madeira wouldn't let me steal in on tip-toe to kiss you! So you went to a party last night? Are you very tired, and was it splendid? Oh, there's the postman!" and she ran to the hall door.

"Oh, what a funny letter, auntie Madeira, look! and the writing is like pa's, and it's foreign. Do open it quick, — 'Miss Bathsheba Madeira.' Oh, just suppose pa wasn't drowned after all!"

Miss Madeira settled her glasses, and studied it. Yes it was — no, it could not be, and her fingers began to tremble with conflicting emotions, her eyes grew dim, and her heart was in a flutter.

"Open it, Queenie," she said, faintly.

Queenie broke the great seal. Out fluttered a queer looking paper, that Moppet seized on at once, and Queenie gave a great, joyful cry.

"He is safe! He is on his way home! He was wrecked, and all that, but oh, isn't it wonderful!"

She flung her arms around Miss Madeira's neck. Moppet joined them, and the three cried together. Then Cissy added her voice, and the twins looked on with stolid wonder.

Queenie laughed, and wiped her eyes. "I suppose people *do* cry for joy sometimes; and it's so splendid! as good as my fairy stories, Moppet; and somehow I never could believe he was dead; and oh, just to think of it!"

Then they all cried again, and Queenie's coffee grew cold, and the children had to have notes for being late at school. After they were out of the way Queenie read the letter again to Miss Madeira. It was quite a stirring story, and from it they learned that he had sent word a month or so before, which had never reached them. And enclosed was an order for one hundred dollars. Captain Mullins had found friends and employment, and would be with them by July.

"Oh, Queenie, my dear darling! and you can leave the stage for good and all! For though you've prospered, and had no misfortunes, the stage being considered such a temptation, and beauty a snare, though it seems to me I'd be sorry to have you otherwise, not being lifted up or vain about it. And you've saved the dear children, and kept them together, while my wits went wool-gathering; and the Lord will reward you, I know. I look to have something out of the common order happen to you."

Miss Madeira's face beamed with gratitude and hope, and was fairly transfigured.

Suddenly Queenie bethought herself of her last night's adventure, and resolved to say nothing about it. There was but a week longer of stage life, and she would be very watchful. Madame Denzil would prove a better counsellor, and not take fright so easily as Miss Madeira.

The thought of Mr. Grenville's proposal flashed over her. Strangely enough, with all his earnestness, she had not been able to think seriously of it. Indeed, her time and interest had been so completely identified with this family, that leaving them seemed out of the question. And now suddenly she found herself free. A bright color mounted

her cheek, and her pulses quickened. Could she, dare she love Harry Grenville?

He was to come presently for his answer.

Somehow, now that the words had been spoken she could not feel surprised. Had interest turned to satiety already? Only last night she had been full of fire and ambition; to-day she was cold and inert. What did the crowd care for the toy that amused them? There had once been a little Violetta, who had danced and died, and when she was put in the lost favorite's place, who thought of tears?

Yet she felt Harry Grenville's admiration was of another kind, with an element of honor in it. She had shunned him as well as the others, because she knew, as well as Madame Denzil could tell her, that these gifts, this adoration, that men were so free to lavish on a favorite of the stage, was not the meed of a true, high-toned respect.

Why, then, did it not touch her? Why did not her heart bound in gladness at the thought of his coming, at the consciousness of his love? Was it merely because the laws and usages of society had placed so wide a gulf between them? With her youth and beauty she could well defy that.

She rose languidly, and began to put the parlor in order. It was Peggy's day out, and Miss Madeira was busy in the kitchen, wiping the tears from her old eyes one moment, and smiling the next. It did not seem now as if they ever could have believed Captain Mullins dead.

To Harry Grenville the hours were interminably long. He read the morning papers to his grandfather while he was partaking of his toast and coffee, and then he must needs decline going out with his mother on account of a pressing engagement. But he would not dare to present himself before Queenie until eleven, surely.

"What is the matter with you this morning, Harry?"

asked his handsome, sharp-eyed grandmother. "You are restless and nervous, and yet you look —"

"Well, grandmamma;" and he laughed uneasily.

"It is not a debt, nor an annoyance — you look too happy. Is it some — good news?"

"There, you have just hit it. Good news. Only, I am not quite sure — that is — I have not heard positively;" and he turned his flushing face toward the window.

"You were at Mrs. Grantley's last evening?"

"Yes, of course."

"And Miss Asheford was there?"

"Yes. As blooming as ever."

"You *do* like her, Harry?"

A frown crossed the fair brow, and the youth bit his lip.

"Not in the way your tone implies, grandmamma."

"But, my dear boy —"

"Haven't I said I would not be talked to about love matters? There, grandmere," giving her a kiss, "do not question me any further. And I must go. Addio;" waving his hand across the room.

"Remember your promise, Harry!" she cried, springing up. "You are to tell me when you make your choice. Your grandpapa is so very exclusive and particular —"

But he was down-stairs, half laughing and half scolding as he went.

"It is on the other side, my proud old grandmere," he was saying to himself. "If *he* saw Queenie once, at her best estate, he would surrender, I know, but it is you I shall have to fight. Ah, you cannot blind me, and yet you love me, I am aware. But Queenie —"

It was still early when he reached the house. What a poor-looking little place it was, to be sure; and how noble she was to stay there and toil for those who were of no kin! He had heard the story from Miss Fay. Ah, how glad he would be to take her out of it all, to keep her dressed in silks and laces, and have a maid to wait upon

her, as his sisters had. Of course they would all be very, very angry at first; but when they knew how good and beautiful she was, and how much in earnest he was,—that he should never, never marry any one else, they would consent. He rather liked the prospect of a struggle for the fair girl, the romance and fervor, the sweet tenderness she would feel for him, and all her lovely, bewitching dependence. But he should always strive to make her understand that her beauty counterbalanced his wealth.

He ventured to ring the door-bell at length. Queenie answered it, lending to the act her own sweet grace and dignity, instead of having it demean her. But she was very grave, and changed somehow, yet all the more lovable for the slight coldness that encircled her.

“My darling —” He dared to say that now.

She turned away her face as she ushered him into the little parlor, with its dingy furniture made more shabby by the romping of children. There were a few choice flowers: he always took care that they awaited her every night. And with a lover’s natural jealousy he liked the room better in that it had no token of other admirers.

Queenie was a trifle embarrassed now. The shy brown eyes drooped, the color went and came in her blossom-like face, and the slender fingers interlaced each other nervously.

“Queenie!” He was down by her side, with his arms around her. “My darling, you *do* love me a little? I have not dreamed vainly —”

It was cruel to pain him, to crush his generous enthusiasm, yet this was the task she had appointed for herself. She would not drag him down to her level. She would not shadow his life in the very beginning.

I will not weary you with the pleading and the arguments. He was earnest, impassioned, royally regardless of obstacles, and accustomed to carry all before him, to convince any one that his way was best and right. He pictured

for her a brilliant future; and, though it tempted, she was steadfast to her own ideas of right and duty.

"But if they consented to receive you, my darling? I will not, cannot give you up! I will wait years, until their patience is exhausted. I will look at no other woman. There is no son beside me, and there is a large fortune. One of my sisters is engaged to a wealthy Southerner, and the other will, no doubt, marry well. Nothing can ever shake my love for you!"

He looked so manly and handsome that she could not help believing in him. Why did it seem so like playing at love to her? Was it because he was her first lover, and she was unused to the ardor and imperiousness of passion? Ah, where was that divine ineffable tenderness, that sacred reliance of first love? For she seemed only tossed about, troubled and uncertain.

He gained a compromise at length. If he could win the consent of his family, even after a struggle, she would yield.

"You will give up the stage," he pleaded. "You have been so little known that the episode will soon be forgotten, and in your new sphere no one will ever be aware of it."

"I shall have no need after this week, when my engagement ends." And then she told him the wonderful news concerning Captain Mullins.

"Queenie," he said, with his glowing enthusiasm, "I think it one of the bravest and noblest things, that you should do just as you did. I shall always be proud of it, my darling."

And there was the episode of last evening to be explained, though she shuddered as she related it.

His bright eyes grew stern as he listened, and the resolute lines about the mouth expressed his indignation as forcibly as any words could have done.

"It was a vile plot on some one's part. Winstead had a hand in it; that is beyond question! I should like to

horsewhip the cowardly scoundrel. And I suspect your Mam'selle Zelig. You are sure of Madame Denzil's friendship."

"Oh, I should as soon doubt her as — you!" and Queenie smiled radiantly.

"Then, when you have seen her, we can settle the rest. I want it left to me. Will you tell her?"

Queenie blushed, and shyly averted her eyes.

"As you like," she answered, timidly.

"I would like the whole world to know that you are my promised wife!" was his proud answer.

Miss Madeira had made ready their frugal meal, the noisy children had trooped home, clattered up and down the stairs, quarrelled because they were forbidden to rush in upon Queenie and her visitor, and now the house was silent once more. Harry Grenville lingered until he was ashamed of the small excuses he was compelled to bring forward, and at last bade Queenie a reluctant farewell, insisting upon the right to bring her home that evening.

"Though it might be as well to ask your brother, as you call him. I will be generous," and he laughed gayly, with the assured faith of love.

Poor Miss Madeira could scarcely comprehend this new phase of affairs.

"If wonders don't stop I'm afraid I shall end my days in a lunatic asylum, on bread and water, and a strait jacket — and a real marriage, my dear — and poor brother-in-law coming up from the depths of the sea; but if ever man was thankful he ought to be to you; and he isn't the worst, for I've noticed them as would let you work your fingers to the bone, and run your feet off, with never a thank'ee, but when it's born in 'em maybe they're not to blame, and you can't most always tell about decrees and fore-ordination, but I hope it's all scripture, as poor, dear father used to believe. He was a great stickler for it, my dear."

Queenie tasted a few morsels, to please Miss Madeira, and then declared that it was absolutely necessary to see Madame Denzil. There was to be a grand benefit this evening for the pretty princess who had so enchanted the theatre-loving world with her startling adventures. There would be little opportunity for any confidence, and she felt that she could not wait.

Dolly Denzil was at home, and alone, fortunately; a little startled at her unexpected visitor, and alarmed at the pale face and weary eyes.

"You little ghost!" she cried. "Is this the way you keep your beauty for the benefit? Ritchie expects us to be overwhelming! Pet said, an hour ago, that the scramble for seats was positively disgraceful. Everything available is gone. What idiots the dear public are! Won't you have a glass of wine? What is the matter?"

"I have come to tell you," and the soft lips quivered. "Dear Madame Denzil, you have been so kind," and Queenie's arms dropped in the other's lap, with a weary motion. "So much has happened to me."

"Well, little nun, I'll promise to be a lenient father-confessor," and the bright eyes sparkled mirthfully.

"First, did you send for me last evening after I went home?"

"Send for you? Why, no!" in the utmost astonishment, opening her eyes very wide.

"Then it was a plot! A cruel, cowardly plot!" was the excited exclamation.

"What was? You are as mysterious as the malevolent fairy. Who plotted? Let me know at once!"

"But I am going to tell you!" and Queenie went rapidly over the main incidents. Madame Denzil listened in the utmost surprise.

"Zelie was at the bottom of it, you may be sure, though that Winstead has been besieging every one for an opportunity to meet you. My little girl, I am so glad that you

have been content to keep out of sight. These green-room acquaintances are seldom of much benefit, unless one cares just for the suppers, the presents, and the sham love. Once in a great while a man marries out of his own circle. Generally it is only pleasant pastime to him, while to the girl it may be the saddest earnest. But what hateful plan could Zelig have had, to throw you into that idiot's power! And what a strange ending! Oh, my child, I shall have to take you and watch over you."

She clasped the young girl to her heart, and kissed the pale lips with eager fondness.

"But that was not the end," said Queenie in a low, strangling tone.

"Was there a Scylla to the Charybdis? Surely, you have not allowed yourself—"

"He wants to marry me!" cried Queenie, distressed beyond measure; and her face crimsoned to its utmost capacity.

"To marry you? Are you quite sure, Queenie? You are so young, so honest and trustful—"

"Let me tell you the rest," interposed the soft, entreating voice."

"Upon my word, Queenie Barretti, you *have* stumbled into a romance. An actual marriage! And do you know it is said those Grenvilles are fabulously wealthy? I once gave the young man a bit of advice, for I *did* like him; and that was to let stage performers alone, and not waste his substance upon their riotous living. He has heeded it beautifully."

"But what must I do?" Queenie implored.

"Do? Why, marry him. You are lovely enough to grace any station, and two years at a good school would make you the peer of any modern young lady. I don't know that I should have stipulated for everybody's consent."

"But if he should be sorry — if he should repent after—"

wards — when there was no help ? ” Queenie asked, breathlessly.

“ My dear, it’s a trick they have. You know the judge sighed for the barefooted maiden ; but if he had married her he would have sighed for the heiress. Queenie, you are quite too young, too unworldly, to understand your own power. The kind of beautiful woman you will make ought to so fascinate her husband that he would hug his chain ; but you will be a sweet, yielding little fool, thinking you owe him all gratitude, all humbleness ; and it will be the very way to tire him. Well, after all you were right not to fall too easily into his hands, like an over-ripe peach. If he is in earnest he can fight his way through a little opposition. Yet I cannot help believing he will prove to be your destiny. Fate arranges these things so oddly. To think that he should come to your rescue last night ! ”

Queenie’s hands dropped helplessly in her lap. If it was fate —

“ You told him that, — all of it ? ”

“ Yes ; and I was to ask you ; but I think it would be so much better to take no notice of it ; ” and she shivered at the thought of figuring in even so slight a scandal.

“ Oh, much the wisest course. Act to-night just as if it had not occurred. Winstead will hardly be likely to boast, I think. Queenie, next week I am going to Chicago ; Pet and I have an engagement there. You must go with us for the rest and change. Let these Mullins people exist by themselves for a while. Surely you have done enough for them ! ”

“ Oh, Madame Denzil,” she cried, with a touch of real pain in her voice, “ they will not need me in that way, any more. Captain Mullins is alive, and is coming home soon. And Miss Madeira is quite well — ”

“ And you are worn and tired. Your sweet face is so appealing that I want to take you in my arms and hush

you to sleep. But have you any idea how the time is going? Will you stay and accompany me to the theatre? If so you shall go to bed directly, and not be disturbed for the next two hours."

"Oh, I cannot, I cannot!" and Queenie sprang up. "I must go home at once."

"There is not the slightest need. See here, I will send a note up to your Miss Madeira. There, not a word. Now I am going to put you on the sofa, and give you a little lavender. Don't worry yourself about another earthly thing. I shall put my threat into execution, and adopt you, and carry you off with me. Then I shall keep watch of that young man; and if he isn't very deserving he will find himself shipped off in a hurry. Poor, tired little thing, you want some one to take care of you, and scold you, and pet you; and I am just the person!"

She bustled about and overruled Queenie, who was too nearly worn out to make much of a resistance. When Madame Denzil had her all nice and quiet she opened a book of poems, and began to read. Thinking of the old times, and Dick Bridger, Queenie dropped into a tranquil slumber.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IS IT TOO LATE ?

PALACE GARDEN was crowded. The music was more entrancing than ever, the stage accessories had been freshened up, the actors and actresses were full of life and spirit. Elegant ladies nodded and smiled, and made the air fragrant with their scented fans and delicious bouquets. Mademoiselle Zanfretti was startlingly lovely, and more sylph-like than ever. The first glimpse of her was greeted with rapturous applause.

Some distance away there was another episode transpiring that concerned her more nearly than she dreamed. It was almost nine when the bell of an elegant up-town residence was answered by the polite waiter.

"Is Mr. Byington in?" asked a full, hearty voice that you would imagine belonged to this robust, stalwart frame and vigorous, though not handsome face. "Will you hand him that card? I will wait here in the vestibule."

The servant returned in a moment. "The gentleman was to walk into the library."

The young man glanced around at the evidences of wealth and refinement, and smiled a little at the subtle odor of a cigar.

"Ah, Mr. Chafney," said the cordial voice of Mr. Byington, and the same kindly face smiled on him that had in the by-gone years roused his ambition to be somebody; "but you grow and change almost out of one's recollection. You are well, I hope?"

"Very well. And yourself and family?"

You would hardly have guessed that this sturdy, honest,

open-faced young man could have been the little street Arab, Tim Chafney. Yet so it was. Mr. Byington's efforts had been assisted by the boy's ambition and resolve. He had not only acquired a profitable and excellent trade, but what with evening schools and reading-rooms he had made himself master of a very fair education.

He answered Mr. Byington's inquiries concerning himself in a very satisfactory manner, and was congratulated upon the improvement he had made.

"It's most kind of you, Mr. Byington, to take an interest in me," said Tim, with frank gratitude. "But I didn't come for that this evening. You have not forgotten the little Nora that brought me all my good fortune? I feel sometimes as if it was cruel to be happy and prosperous, while she is — no one knows where. And I have heard something about her."

Mr. Byington sprang up, excitedly.

"No, Tim!" he exclaimed, as if he could hardly believe it.

"I don't know whether it will prove a clue or not," said Tim, rather uncertainly. "And it's that cruel and wicked! If she had not been dying —"

"She? Not the child?"

oh, no, sir," eagerly. "You knew about the woman my father married — Mother Mell, as she was called. She was a bold, handsome, bad sort of woman, and for two or three years I've heard nothing of her. She is dying in Bellevue; is dead, I suppose, by this time. I was up there this morning. She sent for me last week, but the word was delayed."

"And you heard about Nora?"

"I heard — yes, sir. You see, Mell was desperately jealous because my father took a liking to this little Nora, and she took her off and sold her."

"Sold her! To whom? Poor, sweet little child."

"She sold her to a man who was a sort of receiver for stolen goods, or rather who passed on valuables and made

bargains. And when any one wanted a child for any special purpose, this man, it seems, managed to get possession of the required article."

"And this in our own city! You amaze me."

"Mell said that children were sometimes taken there and kept for big rewards, sometimes sold to street musicians, and for various purposes."

"But we offered a reward," said Mr. Byington.

"Yes. Mell had no idea the child was valuable. She had no rich clothes or jewelry about her. But after she heard, she tried to get her back, and this man, Retzer, had sold her again."

"That sounds incredible, Tim."

"But this is the cruellest part. She would not tell Retzer, lest he might claim the reward, and he would give her no information as to where the child had really gone. To think that she might have been found! And oh, sir, not to know anything about her! Why, she would be a young lady by this time—I counted it up. She was such a beautiful little thing! I can see her now, just like a picture. Mell thinks she was taken out of the city."

"But this man, — Retzer, did you call him, — can we not find him, Tim? Money would be no object. There is her father."

"Oh, sir, isn't it hard?" and Tim winked away some tears. "Mell told me where he was, and I went to the place. It had been a regular hole, a resort for thieves and desperadoes. In April the property was sold, and the houses torn down. They are going to build a row of brick tenements. And Retzer went to Germany — sailed the twentieth of April."

"There certainly is a fatality attending the child. We seem to come upon the traces always too late. You are sure this Mell told the truth?"

"Oh, yes. She seemed sorry and penitent like, and when I told her Nora's father had come back, and was a

great gentleman, the tears just rolled out of her eyes, for she was too weak to cry. The doctor said she had been dying for hours. She couldn't have told such a lie with her last breath, when she could barely speak."

"No, Tim, that would be too terrible. But if she *had* spoken sooner!"

"I found a friend of Retzer's — they're all mighty suspicious, sir, unless it is of people like themselves. I learned that he had a brother at Hamburg, and have the address. I made this man believe it would be greatly to Retzer's advantage, and I hardly think he would deceive so grossly."

"You have a long head, Tim," and Mr. Byington smiled. "I know a mercantile house at Hamburg, and they can do the business through some attorney. We will offer a liberal reward for the information."

"Couldn't her father do something?" asked the young man, eagerly.

"Why, yes. How stupid not to think of it. And yet it seems such a painful story to tell him. But we had better. Will you give me the address?"

Tim produced it, and also the confession, to which Mother Mell had appended her scrawl, in the presence of the physician.

"I shall spare no pains, and yet I have very little hope. If we should find her, with the changes and chances of years between —"

"Oh, sir, she couldn't be anything but what she was then. I can't fancy her growing loud and coarse and common. I am only afraid that she has been hardly used; and she was such a sweet little angel. Maybe I'd better not have taken her in when she clung to me so that day."

"Oh, Tim, don't reproach yourself. But for you we might not even have known these few facts."

"And by fall we can learn what Retzer will tell us. Oh,

Mr. Byington, let us keep up heart a while longer. Somehow this has given me a new hope."

They parted very cordially. Mr. Byington went to his wife's sitting-room, and paused before the portrait of the lovely child.

"Oh, Edward!" and Mrs. Byington sprang up. "You have not heard anything of our little Nora?"

They always said, "Our Little Nora." The child they had never seen was at once an expectation, and, singularly enough, held all the grace of a past possession. More than this, she was theirs. The real child would have a father and a home, this shadowy being could not be taken from them.

"Oh, you have," she cried, impetuously, as he made no answer.

"My dear wife, a man of any discretion would keep this to himself," and he smiled down on the eager face, "but I shall have to tell you, of course, even at the risk of a heart-ache. It is the second real link in the chain, and yet we may never reach the end."

Then he recapitulated the particulars of Tim's call, and the slender thread they had on which to build a hope.

"How strange," she said, after they had discussed it in all its bearings, "that, to-morrow, Roger comes home. He always took such a curious interest in the child; and he more than half believes that little acrobat was Nora. I wish we had taken more pains to find out, for it seems quite possible now that she might have been sold for some such purpose. And his hunting up that Mrs. Chippenham, who was Barretti's wife, may be of some real service. Oh, poor little children! How many of them are sinned against in this world!"

"Why, it would be odd if Roger found another link. But the little girl he traced ran away from some place, did she not? I think she would be likely to go on the stage again. Are there any famous golden-haired young women acrobats?"

"Oh, I hope she has not taken to the stage," cried Mrs. Byington. "I have never had any faith in Roger's *protege*, but just now I have a presentiment, or a misgiving —"

"Wait until we see him; and, above all, let us say nothing to Maggie."

The steamer had been signalled late that afternoon, and the next morning Mr. and Mrs. Byington drove down to the wharf in the carriage. Roger had been two years abroad, and he had left George at school in a quaint old German town.

Mrs. Byington sat there impatiently, while the legal formula was being complied with. And then her husband came elbowing his way through the crowd, with a tall, handsome, laughing fellow on his arm, whose creamy skin was like fine bronze, and whose magnificent eyes were more brilliant than ever, while a luxuriant moustache gave him an oriental air.

"Aunt Alice!" "Roger!"

They said it in a breath. No mother could be prouder of him than she was, or more thankful for the health, honor, and purity shining in the sunny face.

"I've just been explaining to uncle Edward that I brought home that poor Mrs. Chippenham. She is to go to a quiet lodging-house, with another passenger. Oh, aunt Alice!" and the handsome face was all alight.

"I can guess, Roger. The little Queen Titania *was* Nora. If I had gone, that day, at Seaview!"

"Yes. It is an odd story, quite a romance, in fact. Mrs. Chippenham heard that she died in a hospital. She is living yet, I am sure, and all the rest is easy. It is only to advertise for the little Queen Titania. But oh, how are you all, and dear Lal? I've thought so much about Nora that I can hardly get her out of my mind. But it is so delightful to see your faces once more, and to be at home. Have I changed much?"

"Yes, and no. But I will forgive your talking about Nora. We can come to ourselves afterward. What proof have you?"

"Nothing but the child's story, and the dates. She went to this Dick Bridger the very day of her second disappearance. He found her, or obtained her somewhere in New York. She told the story of her losing Maggie in the street, of Tim Chafney befriending her, and that horrid hag of a mother Mell, who took her to the house from whence Dick Bridger carried her away."

"And your hero, your wonderful athlete bought her like a little slave. At least, mother Mell sold her. We heard so last evening," said Mrs. Byington, bitterly.

"I fancied it must have been something like that from what Mrs. Chippenham said. And yet she might have fallen into worse hands. What puzzled me about it is that neither of them saw the advertisement."

"And she remembered her being lost — Maggie, and all? Edward, it will be hardly worth while to bother about that man Retzer. When can we see Mrs. Chippenham? How fortunate that you brought her home."

"Poor thing! And yet she amuses me. With a kindly heart, she has so little common sense. She had quite a fortune when she married this man Chippenham. She gave it all to him, and was persuaded to hire out this little Queen Titania. He has spent it, is a miserable drunkard and gambler, has treated her cruelly, and now she has left him. Indeed, I found her living at service in an American family; but the scoundrel managed to get her wages."

"If we can but find her! I do think she would naturally return to the stage," said Mr. Byington. "Do you know it will soon be nine years since she was lost."

"All her sweet young life!" exclaimed Mrs. Byington, regretfully. "And now one cannot tell what she will be."

"Do you know, aunt Alice, I have the utmost faith in her, the greatest hope for her. She was such a noble,

truthful little girl. Mrs. Chippenham has related so many touching incidents about her. I do not see how she could bear to give up the child. She said Nora would not tell a lie to save herself from any punishment, and she raves about the child's beauty. I believe the woman from whom she ran away misrepresented her horribly."

Mrs. Byington sighed. She could not be as hopeful as Roger. She knew how many temptations there were for a girl, young and beautiful; and even if she had committed no overt act, she must, nearly all these years, have been without any elevating or refining influences.

They reached the house presently, and then the proud and fond aunt saw more clearly the improvement there had been in Roger the last two years. How delighted his father would be! No traces of dissipation in that healthful eye, or glowing cheek, while his bearing and manners had the courteous refinement of a true gentleman.

"I think," he said, some time after lunch, "that I had better bring Mrs. Chippenham up here, and we will all go over the case. There must be no possibility of a mistake. Then when we advertise we will send a copy to every theatrical manager of any note in the country."

He was so engrossed, however, that he did not set out to seek Mrs. Chippenham until the next morning. She was still much fatigued from her journey, and affected by the great change in her fortunes.

Poor Kate. Dearly had she paid for her folly in listening to Chippenham's delusive love tale. She had been slow to suspect, and even her suspicions were easily allayed at first. Ignorant of business, and the management of property, she did not know that he was squandering right and left, on his own foolish experiments, until it was gone. Then casual neglect turned into habitual indifference. When Kate ventured on a rather fretful remonstrance, she found that instead of a master she had a tyrant. Diamonds, valuable laces, and silks, were parted with, and

when she was forced to take a service-place to keep from absolute starvation her once adored husband, now a brutish drunkard, did not hesitate to use threats to extort a part of her wages. How thankful she was when Roger Lasselle dropped down upon her, questioned her, and heard in return her rambling, complaining story, and offered to take her back to America. She shed tears of gratitude, and was eagerly, childishly delighted with the news that Queenie was not dead.

The years had aged and changed her a good deal. The glossy back hair had many a silver thread, and the once comely face looked faded, haggard; the figure had developed into middle-aged stoutness. It was hardly in human nature, certainly not in her nature, not to bewail her former luxury. She who had lived at hotels, and kept a carriage, to be reduced to this plight.

Roger brought her over to his aunt, and Tim Chafney's episode united the two stories. There could be no further doubt about Queenie's identity. The only trouble now was to find her.

"I think we had better append Mrs. Chippenham's name to the advertisement," said Mr. Byington. "She will learn by that endorsement that it is no plot or trap, and be more likely to answer it. If she is in public life she must surely see it."

Roger glanced over the paper, on Thursday morning, with a rather discontented air. He knew the personal was handed in too late for publication, and yet he half hoped to see it. Then he ran his eye over the theatre lists. No familiar name there.

"If this little Queen Titania had become very famous you would have heard of her, Lawrence, of course. What if she should not be on the stage?"

"Mamma would be better satisfied."

"And she would be more difficult to find."

"How strangely impatient you are, Roger!"

"Am I, Lal?" Well, I suppose it is because I have heard and talked so much about her during the last six weeks. And then we seem to come so near! Oh, Lal, of course you have been to see that great thing at the Palace Garden? 'Last week' here, in flaming capitals. What a wonderful run it has had! Was it good?" with sudden interest.

"Well, yes," rather deliberately. "You'd like it immensely, Roger. There is some exquisite dancing, though I am not specially fond of ballet. Why didn't I think to go last evening? There was a tremendous benefit. Mam'selle Zelig is no favorite of mine, but people do go wild about her. But there are some marvellously lovely girls; and many of the scenes are unsurpassed for beauty."

"Why not go to-night?" exclaimed Roger, eagerly.

"I have an engagement," and a delicate color fluttered over Lawrence Byington's face. "But we will go to-morrow night, Roger, and I'll ask some people I know to join us. There is a young fellow, Harry Grenville by name, who is just about as stage crazy as you are. He will join us, I know."

"Ah, here is an account of the benefit," and Roger glanced it over. "This quite excites my curiosity. Well, Lal, agreed. I'll just take a touch of your New York dissipation while it is going."

That evening there was an elderly, prosy couple to dinner, some distant connection. Lawrence excused himself, and Roger, after being bored awhile with reminiscences of the good old times, lighted his cigar, and sauntered in the street. How restless and uneasy he had grown. Was it all about this famous Queen Titania?

Why not drop into the Palace Garden? It would be rather late, but he could see the whole play to-morrow night, that is, if it would bear a repetition. It might help him pass away an hour or two, and then aunt Alice would be at liberty.

He hailed a horse-car, and quickly reached his destination. Admittance he could gain, but a seat was not to be had, unless there happened to be some accidentally vacant.

"Never mind," said Roger, "I will run my chance."

The heat and closeness half stifled him, at first. Yes, it was packed, sure enough. Ah, what delicious strains of music! No wonder the listeners were enchanted.

He had been standing some ten minutes, or more, when a gentleman beckoned to him.

"We are compelled to leave," the stranger said, in a low tone. "My companion is too faint to remain. Would you like a seat?"

"Oh, thank you," returned Roger, with an appreciative smile.

He could see directly on the stage now. The bewitching fairy-ring had been in the scene before, but he looked and listened, and presently yielded to the enchantment.

Suppose Titania was in such a group as this! There was a tall, slender, fair-haired girl—no, he could not imagine that her. There was a jolly rollicking little thing, — well, blonde tresses certainly were in the ascendency. Hark! There was a dainty bit of song, a sort of Lurlei call—ah, what a lovely face! What an exquisite form, and a foot that would scarcely crush violets. An immense favorite, too, if one could judge from the applause. He followed down the programme — *Mademoiselle Zanfretti*.

She disappeared, but, presently, when there was another burst of enthusiasm, he found it bestowed upon her entrance. Every eye seemed to follow her. She had no beguiling coquettish ways, she rarely glanced up, indeed, the longer he watched the more she seemed something apart from the play, and where she mingled with the others, it was done in a shy, deprecating manner. She affected him like an exquisite strain of music.

There was a soft night scene, one of the later interpolations in the play. Far up, in an enchanted castle, lived the

cruel fairy who held the princess in bondage. Only one perilous charm could subdue her, a midnight incantation. Up through airy clouds tripped the lithe figure. There sat the old hag, gazing at the midnight stars, when before her eyes appears — what? — a sprite of the air? Only well-trained nerves could have balanced themselves on those deceptive blue and silver clouds, could have danced with the wonderful airy motion. The mist of soft, golden hair seemed to melt into the ether, and form a halo. And, oh, what glorious eyes, seen way up there! What dainty, twinkling feet! What delicate, slender hands! Ah, no wonder they can weave a charm that shall bind the evil spirit, while from below they enter and carry off the captive princess, because the old hag has forgotten her watch one minute too late, tranced by this bewildering sprite. Down she threads her way again.

Ah! Had something suddenly rendered Roger blind and dumb! The curtain fell — there was a rapture of applause, but he knew of both as in a dream. He sat stunned, as if some one had struck him a blow. That last marvellous turn, that wave of the hand, the half-smiling expression. He could not even think for some moments.

Then the princess was restored to her father's palace. There was a great array of courtiers and ladies; peasants and shepherdesses danced on the green; there was music, and ringing of joy bells; a brave, handsome, true lover; a wedding; and the curtain fell.

It rose again on an enchanting scene. The palace, the bank of a stream, the princess and her husband setting sail for the happy islands. The groves were full of nymphs, goddesses, and allegorical figures, in the most bewilderingly beautiful of poses. The lily cups held a fairy sprite, great creamy magnolias displayed a face rapturously lovely. He ran them over with feverish haste and eagerness, while the audience sat breathless. There she was, on a pedestal — a Psyche with her lamp, in that wonderful, listening, walt-

ing attitude. No sculptor could have made her more perfect.

The vast interior swam round before him. Was he being transported to enchanted regions?

He remembered, at length, that the play was over, and the densely packed audience crowding out. Could he believe anything so wild, so improbable, as that he had found her, Queen Titania? It was quite absurd, and he laughed aloud. Yet the child would have made just such a radiant girl. Was he to wait the slow motions of this great concourse, who stopped, and commented, and elbowed?

He rushed through a side door, down the stairs, climbed over the orchestra seats, gave one flying leap on the stage, and pushed aside the curtain amid an endless mass of scenes and confusion.

"No strangers admitted," exclaimed a gruff voice. "We can't have it. 'Gainst all the rules."

"I *must* see the manager a moment—" he looked at his programme — "Mr. Ritchie."

"I'm not sure that you can. Go round the other way to the office. This is against the rule."

"My business is very urgent, and he will only need to answer one question. It can take but a moment."

Something in Roger's politely persistent air seemed to move the man, against his will. He led the way, grumbling, avoiding the dressing-rooms, though nymphs, and shepherds, and princes, and ordinary mortals appeared inextricably mixed.

"Wait here," was the rather rough command.

Roger waited until he almost lost his patience.

"You wanted me —" a voice said, presently, as he was wandering in a labyrinth of dreams.

"Ah, pardon my intrusion. It is to ask —" and Roger studied his programme again — "if you know anything about this Mademoiselle Zanfretti. That, of course, is a stage *nom de plume*. Is her real name Barretti?"

Ritchie studied the handsome stranger before him.

"I am not at liberty to answer any questions about Mam'selle Zanfretti," he said at length.

"But that is so simple," was the impatient response. "Or — could I see her?"

"You cannot. I think, indeed, she has gone home."

"If you will answer that question, in strictest confidence, it may be of immense importance to her. If she is *not* the person, that ends it."

Ritchie stroked his beard thoughtfully.

"Griffin," he said, "take this gentleman to my den, and call Madame Denzil. You can ask her," to Roger.

Roger's heart gave a great thump. It seemed to him the question had been answered in the affirmative already. Had he really found her — little Queenie? He murmured her name softly in the solitude, and waited, no longer impatient. His quest had certainly been crowned. Now he saw, in his mind, so many resemblances. And that dainty, delicious song! Her mother was a singer, and she had inherited that with her other gifts.

Would Madame Denzil never come?

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN UNKNOWN RIVAL.

QUEENIE'S tired out, throbbing nerves yielded to Madame Denzil's soothing treatment, as they had in by-gone times to Dick Bridger's. She fell asleep, and Dolly had not the heart to wake her until it was absolutely necessary. She was bright and fresh for the evening, her soft starry eyes gleaming with unwonted splendor.

"And now," began Dolly, "I've been thinking over this vile plot, and it seems to me the best and wisest course is to take no notice at all of it. I'd like to hire a brawny Irishman to thrash that scoundrel Winstead to a jelly, but that would make a scandal, and now we must begin to consider Mr. Grenville. I am actually amazed at you, Queenie, for I think the young man must be in earnest, and it is wonderful luck; but then there's Kitty Bell, not as handsome as you, who has gone to be a great and real lady in upper ten-dom. But I must see him. I shall be your self-appointed guardian in love matters, and if he is not all on the square he can march."

"But is it quite right?" asked Queenie, timidly. "He is rich, and his family are grand, and I am only —"

"Lovely enough to grace any station in society. And for that matter who is going to know of this bit of stage life! There, not a word, modest little violet. I'll settle the whole matter."

"And you will take me to Chicago?" she asked, earnestly. "I would like to get away. And if we could manage — not to say anything —"

"Of course we can. We start next Tuesday. Now

you must eat a little supper, and then we will be off to the scene of our labors, practical women that we are."

Mademoiselle Zelig was quite confounded at Queenie's self-possession. She did not seem to shun her in the slightest degree, or appear conscious that any incident had occurred to disturb the ordinary course of events. Winstead had not joined the party again, so she was ignorant of the termination. She really had not the courage, insolent as she was, to broach it, especially as she must make an opportunity. And the next evening was *her* benefit—perhaps it would be well not to try her rival too far.

Tip was promptly on the spot that evening. Queenie wished Madame Denzil a hurried good-night, and flew to him with inexpressible relief.

Some one else stood beside her with a quiet, but half imperious, greeting. A thrill sped through her—was it terror or joy?

"Ah, good evening, Mr. Mullins," and Harry Grenville held out his faultlessly gloved hand, with a very winsome cordiality. "Come," he said, in a lower tone, "I have a hack waiting for you. There are to be no more risks."

Why was it not pleasant to be thus appropriated and cared for? Queenie clung closer to the boy's arm, and Tip flushed with a strange embarrassment, hardly knowing what he ought to do, and yet feeling quite sure that Queenie did not mean him to leave her.

Neither did Mr. Grenville, for that matter, though he was all impatience, and could barely tolerate the presence of a third person. But he was generous enough not to be vexed when Tip took the seat beside Queenie.

"I want to see you a few moments," he whispered, as they alighted.

She ushered him into the small parlor, littered with traces of the ubiquitous twins.

"Oh, my darling," he cried, how cold, how far away you seem. Can you not trust me to the uttermost? What

shall I do to gain your entire confidence? Have you any friend — can I see your Miss Madeira, and convince her how truly earnest and honorable my intentions are? And I have brought you a ring.”

“Oh, no, not yet!” And she shrank back in dismay. “And have you —”

He laughed gaily.

“No, I have not,” he said. “My secret was so precious that I wanted to gloat over it a while, like a miser. And Queenie, your pride and prudence does you infinite credit. Though it frets me, I must frankly confess, yet I would not have you without that delicate self-respect. But you need not fear. And you *will* wear my ring. I shall not feel that you are safe until I see it on your finger.”

“Not now.” She drew her hand away suddenly, while a deep flush overspread her brow. “Until my engagement ends I can make no promise. Nay, do not pain me by persisting. When you have talked this matter over with your family you may look upon it in a different light. I am poor; I have been used to common ways and common people all my life. I have no accomplishments. I —”

“Queenie, you shall not underrate yourself. You have your marvellous beauty; your voice that, with a little cultivation, would be remarkable, and you do possess the refinements and graces of a sphere far above your present station. Where you can have acquired them is a mystery, unless indeed they were your natural birthright. To-day you would compare favorably with my sisters, which is no mean praise, and as for accomplishments, — why, I could teach you myself. We would be married, and go to Europe immediately. You should be a little school-girl, and I the tutor; and the more ignorant you were, the more delight there would be in teaching you. And then, some day, to the great surprise of everybody, you would blossom out, a lovely and fascinating woman, and every one would

be wild to know you. Then by the time we came back they would all be glad enough to receive you. And I don't need to marry for money. There is a fabulous fortune in the Grenville family, that came from England; we were some of the fortunate 'lost heirs,' " and he smiled.

She was greatly moved by all this generosity, and the pure, proud affection beaming in his eyes. And yet—why did not her heart leap and thrill? Was it caution merely?

"You are so good, so kind" — her voice faltered over the words, and she had much ado to keep the tears from her eyes. "But if you would *only* wait. I am so tired. I seem to need all my strength for my duties this week. I can hardly think what is right or wise —"

They had both been standing, but now she dropped on a chair, quite overcome with the tense strain. Her face was lily-like in its paleness, her soft, imploring eyes were raised timidly, her rarely-curved lip quivered as if it were shaping itself to a sob.

"Oh, my darling, how thoughtless and cruel I am!" and he threw himself at her feet. "Yes, you have been sorely tried and shaken about, my beautiful, delicate, white rose, and I will not add to your discomfort. Only say once that you love me —"

Her eyes swam in tears. So entrancingly lovely did she look that he clasped her to his heart.

"My dear Queenie, I *will* wait," he exclaimed, in a tender, deeply-moved voice. "You will see that I can be patient. A week is not so very long, and I shall see you every evening, at least."

"Thank you," she murmured.

"I will not ask you to wear my ring until then, though I feel as if some untoward fate might wrest you from me," and he kissed the soft, fair hand with passionate tenderness. "And now, Queenie, did you tell Madame Denzil about that dastardly plot? What did she advise?"

Queenie was thankful to have the conversation take some other turn, and repeated her friend's counsel.

"Yes, that is the wisest course. But I shall keep close watch of the scoundrel. If he dares to utter one boasting word, he answers to me, sharp and quick. I am so glad it is to be all ended soon. Providence certainly sent back this Captain Mullins in the very nick of time. You cannot plead any further duty to them, you heroic little girl!"

Her tired face moved him so much that he soon bade her adieu, though with reluctance in every word and gesture.

Late as it was, Tip, Moppet, and Miss Madeira were waiting for their darling. The events of the day had been too great to allow of going to bed quietly without another discussion.

"Oh, Queenie!" cried Tip, with honest tears in his boyish eyes, "he's handsome and a great swell, a real grand one, I mean; none of your stuck-up, shoddy fellows. But I can't bear to think that you will go away and forget us. If I was a man, and could earn heaps of money, you never should. Or if pa was rich! But I don't wonder, for, after all, you have been almost a slave to us, and I've been rough and careless and selfish, but I never shall be again,—only how can we give you up?"

She smiled through her tears, and twined her soft arms about his neck.

"Don't trouble, Tip dear," she said in her tenderest tone. "I have a presentiment that — of course he does love me; but there are so many things — his family would oppose such a marriage, and I don't feel it in my bones, as auntie Madeira says, that it will ever happen. I may belong to you years and years. There is only one thing: I want to go to Chicago next week with Madame Denzil, for a little rest and change, and to be away from it all. But oh, to think of your dear father!"

Then they all cried again, and auntie Madeira talked in

her disjointed fashion, going over the old time when she had found Queenie sleeping in the corner of the porch. She always bewailed her remissness on this point. Consequently it was after midnight before the house was quiet, and they were all in bed.

Queenie felt that she had gained a brief reprieve. Why should she shrink from this sweet love-dream? In a confused way she tried to remember the feelings and sentiments of her favorite heroines, but there seemed nothing to apply to her case. Was it the strangeness, added to the certainty that the Grenville family would oppose such an alliance and consider her a shameful, designing girl, who had deliberately entrapped this unsuspecting young man?

Harry Grenville wended his way homeward to the aristocratic hotel where the family were staying. He had established for himself the utmost liberty of coming and going; indeed, he often went directly to his room without stopping in the family parlor. But to-night the door was opened, and a soft voice said:

"Harry!"

He turned, rather impatient of the interruption.

"Oh, is that you, grandmamma? Is any one ill?"

"No, my dear. Come in a while. Where have you been?"

The voice was at its sweetest estate, and the question was asked as carelessly as if its purport were indifferent.

"Oh," he returned gayly, "I have been listening to the enchantment of that Enchanted Princess. I never did hear such music. And this week finishes it. The houses are crowded to suffocation."

He leaned gracefully in the doorway, as if he meant to linger but a moment.

"Come in;" and she took his hand in hers. "I have something to tell you, Harry."

"Well." But his dream of Queenie was so sweet that he did not care to have it disturbed.

"Mr. Byington was here this evening. Harry, there is really no doubt but that you will have him for a brother. A most elegant and unexceptionable young man; and the family, from what I can hear, is irreproachable."

"Oh, they are delightful people. Mrs. Byington is a perfect lady. Lawrence just adores his mother. Well, Blanche will be as fortunate as Lucia. Really, grandmere, your young ladies do you great credit."

"Yes." Yet her eyes were fixed a little uneasily upon him. "Indeed, I have always said that with proper training young girls seldom make either a mesalliance or a romantic scandal, which is my abhorrence. Yet one always feels a little careful. And now it only remains for you to choose wisely and honorably, and I shall be quite content with my children."

She was such a handsome and still fascinating old woman, and she looked like a duchess of royal line, in her soft flowing silk and rare old lace. A tea-rose at her throat, too, and a sprig of pungently sweet heliotrope.

Harry Grenville drew a long breath. Was not this an auspicious moment? If he could manage the affair in his own way he would say nothing, but marry Queenie next week or next month, and take her abroad, allowing all parties to get reconciled at their leisure. But Queenie's pride and resolution stood in the way. He felt that to win her he must be the soul of honor himself. And since he did mean to make her his wife, it would be better, perhaps, to have the fight now.

"At least, grandmamma, you can depend upon my marrying some one worthy of the highest regard," he answered with quiet dignity.

Her keen eyes studied his face, though they seemed to look beyond it. Had he really entangled himself? She had begun to suspect something of late.

"Your mother and I have hoped — we like Miss Ashcroft so much."

It was thrown out as a net to catch the unwary, and she listened breathlessly for the response.

"It will not be Miss Ashcroft."

"Harry! Who then? Have you really made an election?"

He started suddenly, and began to pace the floor. She was at his side in an instant, her arm linked in his, and clinging to him with a sweet, dependent fondness.

"Harry," she cried, with a pang of anxiety, "tell me the truth! You have seen some one, and she is not — But you cannot demean yourself, your family, surely!"

"Grandmamma," he began frankly, "I ought to tell you, I will tell you, and you must not be angry but help me, for my mind is made up so fully. I may have had fancies before, but this I am assured is love. I have met the woman, the girl rather, that I wish to marry."

"Well?" graciously, holding the strong feelings and temper in abeyance.

"She is so matchlessly beautiful, so sweet, so good and noble —"

"Have I seen her?"

The quick, crimson flush did not escape the sharp, old eyes.

"You do not know her, of course," he answered evasively. "She is not in our circle, but she is worthy of the highest place there. If I could only tell you of her goodness, her heroism, her simple, lovely truth."

"You would think that of any one you loved, Harry. You have a peculiarly trusting disposition. Am I right to suspect that she is poor — obscure?"

There was a touch of rather stinging bitterness in the tone. These indeed were sins in her world.

"She is poor," he said bravely; "and certainly, in this sense, obscurity is no detriment. For the opportunity that has been hers she is well informed; she has a most exquisite voice, and could be very easily accomplished."

"Have you spoken to her?"

"I have," was the reply. "I am engaged;" and he uttered the words with a touch of tender, manly pride.

"I must say, Harry, that I think it would have been well to have taken a little counsel on the subject, and not have been made the dupe of some pretty girl, with a designing family to cheer her on in her attempt to entrap a man every way her superior."

"Oh, grandmamma," and now he laughed with gay cheerfulness, though he was a good deal annoyed, "I am the dupe of neither girl nor family. In the first place she has no family. She lives with some people; and I think the obligation has been all on their side. I hardly believe she could have been won away from them while they needed her, but there has occurred a change in their circumstances which will give her a little liberty. And then I could hardly make her promise: she is as much of an aristocrat as yourself, and insisted that I should explain my intentions to my own family before she would even consent to be engaged."

"Then you are not —"

"I am bound in honor, as I think you will admit; at least you would so consider a young man who had spoken to my sisters. And now, grandmamma, let us come to an understanding. I am aware that this will not please you or my mother at first, but when you come to know her you will be satisfied. As for her birth, what does it matter? She has no family, and I shall raise her to my station. And surely I do not need to marry for wealth."

Madame Grenville was silent for several moments, as they paced up and down the apartment. This was not merely boyish enthusiasm, but rather the quietude of a man's deep-settled purpose. She might argue endlessly, she might command, entreat — ah, there was one point she could try!

"Suppose your grandfather does not think so, Harry? The fortune is large, to be sure. But he might feel dis-

posed *not* to be so generous to a disobedient grandson who sets his wishes at naught," and her voice rang with a touch of sharpness.

"Grandmamma, I know this; it will all be as you say in the end. Mamma may make a time at first, and cry, and grandpapa may not approve, but if you decide that there shall be no great fuss, there will be none."

"And you expect me to range myself on your side? Well, Harry, you are mistaken. This is a foolish fancy, and would lead you into a step that ten years hence you will be ashamed of, and rue to your life's end. Take a little time to consider. Your grandfather did not hesitate to disinherit his own daughter for a wretched, low marriage."

"This would be neither wretched nor low. And I have resolved. This girl's only crime is lack of wealth, which is nothing in my eyes. Why, if it comes to that, I can work for her, and would do it gladly. Let us talk no more about it for a month or two, for I would not willingly annoy or offend you."

"Harry, promise me one thing," she cried, seizing both hands in hers. "Swear to me that you will not marry her clandestinely."

"She would not allow me to," he answered, haughtily. "I had promised her I would tell you, and I have told, and I think when you see how in earnest I am you will yield, or if not —"

"Will you promise me to wait one year? That is not much, surely, but it will test the affection on both sides."

"I will promise you that, gladly. And now, dear grandmamma, though you cannot help being disappointed, let us go on as before, and forgive me that I cannot suit you in everything."

"I accept your sacred word."

"Good-night, then. It is late, and you will lose all your beauty sleep."

He kissed her, and was gone. Once in his own room, he lighted a cigar and threw himself in an easy-chair. It had not been so difficult as he fancied. Of course they would all see how resolute he was, and after the girls were well married — it was a wise move promising to wait a year, and he smiled. Queenie should never go on the stage again. He would get Mrs. Denzil to place her in some school, where he could visit her occasionally — they would correspond, and be true to one another always.

Madame Grenville sat where he had left her, with clinched hands, and a face not pleasant to behold. She had circumvented one or two youthful fancies not quite to her taste, and it would go hard with her if she did not find a way to manage this, and him also. Who was the girl? She must strike her blow in secret, and so it was best not to be very angry with her grandson, but just keep up a little impression of having been hurt, offended.

Finally, having settled her plans, she went to bed, troubled by no pangs of conscience.

Before Harry was up the next morning she had summoned the faithful factotum of their small retinue.

"James," she said, "I am rather troubled about Master Harry. If he were a gay, dissolute young man, one would hardly care to inquire into his doings, or desire to know anything that would reflect upon his family or position. He spends a good deal of his time, evenings, somewhere. I want you to learn for me in what company."

The sleek, immaculate African bowed quietly.

"You have no idea?"

"He goes a good deal to Palace Garden."

"And those 'Houries' are very tempting. Well, young men will be young men, and such things seldom last. Still, I would like to know;" and she slipped a bank note into the man's hand.

He bowed as imperturbably as before.

Madame Grenville turned ashen pale, and bit her lip

until the intense pain warned her. Would he dare marry an actress, — a dancer, maybe! Ah, if it was so, then surely any means were lawful that snatched him from destruction.

The next morning James sought his mistress.

She was used to reading faces. "You learned something," she said in a positive tone. "There is a girl in the case."

"There is. A Mademoiselle Zanfretti, one of the favorite dancers in the Enchanted Princess. Her real name is Barretti, and she lives with some people by the name of Mullins, at — Street. He took her some flowers yesterday morning, and attended her home at night in a hack."

"Very well. You are always faithful, James. I am glad we are to leave the city so soon, for I do not approve of these entanglements."

A stage-dancer! Ah, she had moved in the matter none too soon. All this girl's honor and nobleness had been put on to fasten her victim the more securely in her net! Once married, and that certainly was what she aimed at, they, the Grenvilles, might whistle to the winds.

Oh, had he, reared so carefully, trained in all ways of family dignity and pride; had he no greater regard for his blue blood and faultless lineage? And yet, *was* it his fault altogether? The girl was beautiful and seductive as a siren. Her few years of girlhood had doubtless been used with the one aim to fascinate, whether on or off the stage. To marry some innocent youth, so that he had plenty of money; to graft herself in amongst decency and honor; she whose whole being was a blot and a disgrace, except just there on the stage; a soulless machine of fair flesh and blood, whose duty was to enchant people nightly, and keep out of their way by daylight, like a foul, noisome thing!

She could be bought by money, — there was no question

about that; all of her order could. It was the money, not the poor dupe Harry, and the grand dame smiled with dreary scorn. So if she should outbid him —

She had his promise, and she could trust him to keep it. Once detach him from her and he would soon forget. Yet there was not a moment to lose. This very morning she must see her.

Very regal and sweet was Madame Grenville through the morning meal. You would hardly have guessed that she was dying with impatience to have it ended. There was a fine shade of manner toward Harry that he alone understood.

"Poor Grandmamma," he mused. "I suppose the thought is terrible, and I am glad I did not tell her the worst. I think I can persuade Queenie to leave the stage, and no one will ever need to know."

"Harry," she said, "your grandpapa would like you to go over some papers with him this morning." Then, bending her stately head, she added, "Be patient with him, dear, for sometime you may try his patience and love to the uttermost."

She dressed herself in her plainest attire, and went out to find a woman who was said to mend laces exquisitely.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MADAME GRENVILLE'S FORTUNATE MOVE.

QUEENIE had still refused, the evening before, to wear her lover's ring. Not until she was through with her present engagement, and free from the stage, would she be bound by any promise. But the anxiety wore her greatly. That her lover's family would object strenuously to such an alliance she well knew, and with her strict sense of justice she could not find it in her heart to blame them.

She had slept late, worn out with mental as well as physical fatigue. Faithful Peggy proved such a good friend that it was no longer necessary for her to assist Miss Madeira in the petty household tasks. Moppet had prepared a cunning little breakfast this morning. Indeed, the children all began to vie with each other as to which could do the most for Queenie. Cassy insisted that his headless horse should be there to welcome her, and Polly had brought his rag-baby, the delight of his life, whose complexion was renewed every Saturday, but who still persisted in taking on the hues of Africa.

She lingered over it, wondering. She had begged Harry Grenville not to come this morning, and with the inconsistency of the feminine mind, she was already speculating whether obedience would please her best. She clung to his friendship fondly, but did she really want his love? Marriage! At that she shrank and shivered, longing to understand her own heart.

Moppet kissed her good-by and was off. Pug wished he could dance,— though he didn't want to be a girl,— so that he needn't go to school. But they were off presently, and

Queenie went up-stairs, to look over her wardrobe and see how much of it would be presentable.

There was a quick, authoritative ring at the door. That was not Harry, so she did not stir until Miss Madeira put her head in the apartment.

"There is a lady to see you, Queenie," she announced. "Such a grand-looking person, though her dress isn't wonderful, and coming on foot, too; but she does look as if she had just stepped out of a carriage."

"Did she send any name?" asked the girl.

"No. It was some business, she said, and that she wouldn't detain you long."

It could not be Mam'selle Zelig, and she inquired if the visitor were young.

"Oh, no;" and Miss Madeira laughed in a surprised sort of cackle. "Why, her hair's whiter'n mine, only there's more of it, and she's handsome, too."

"Very well. I will be there in a minute."

Queenie made herself presentable, and went down. The room was not in a glare of light, but the youthful figure entering it startled the visitor, who did not rise from the sofa, but inclined her head stiffly. A haughty head, too, whose every motion was imperious, and whose piercing eyes sent a shiver through Queenie. One of those unaccountable touches of repulsion stole over the child, a presentiment that she would find an enemy in this handsome, brilliant old lady, whom she seemed to have known and expected all her life.

"Miss Barretti, I believe," in a cold, yet peculiarly fascinating voice.

Queenie responded in the affirmative.

"And I am Madame Grenville!"

If she expected the announcement to overwhelm the fair, slender young girl before her, she was quite mistaken. A wondering color fluttered slowly over the sweet face, but the clear, brown eyes never wavered. Strangely

enough Queenie could not even make herself feel surprised at thus meeting her antagonist. That there should be dissension between them was inevitable.

"I am Madame Grenville," the visitor repeated, with a more decisive expression of hauteur. "I think you know my grandson, Mr. Harry Grenville."

"Yes," Queenie replied, in a quiet manner, so faultless in its air of elegance that Madame Grenville positively stared, and took a survey of her that was insolent, until it met the clear, truth-compelling eyes. Then her own wavered a little, her pitiless purpose seemed to undergo a compulsory change.

"My dear young lady," she began, in a tone that could be so delusively sweet and winsome, "recent events have gone far toward making us natural enemies, and yet I come to you in a spirit of sincere friendship. I may have some painful things to say, but you look as if I could trust somewhat to your good sense. Sit down here beside me, and let us go over the matter in a clear-sighted, unprejudiced way."

Queenie sat down in a confused, helpless manner. Madame Grenville noted the exquisitely lovely face, that had no need of the adventitious aids of art, the sloping shoulders, as perfect as those of some sculptured nymph, the small, white hands drooping in her lap, the accidental attitude so perfect in its grace, and for an instant, like her grandson, she was almost won by a nameless fascination, and was absolutely compelled to rouse herself.

"My grandson has confessed his passion to me," she began, with an unconscious sharpness, the natural result of having been won against her will. "Unlike most young men, he was honorable enough to propose marriage, but how you pretty young girls can place any faith in a man's word, given under the spell of infatuation, and forgotten in a few months, puzzles me, except that I suppose in most cases you are as ready for the change as

they. And it is about this very point that I have come to speak."

"He asked me to marry him," Queenie began, with the perfect dignity of refinement. "I was sorry, because —"

"Sorry!" echoed Madame Grenville in amazement.

It seemed as if some sudden revelation had flashed upon Queenie. What love was like she did not know, but she understood now by a fast dawning, womanly prescience, that her feeling for Harry Grenville was not the absorbing passion poets had pictured, or for which women had bravely suffered and died.

"Yes," she made answer; "if I could love him as he wishes to be loved —"

"And yet you have allowed yourself to become engaged — you have him fast in your net, and consider yourself free!" exclaimed the elder lady, angrily.

"I think he will tell you that I *have* refused to consider it an engagement at present," Queenie said bravely, though her face flushed with the tumultuous crimson blood, and every pulse quivered in indignation. "And it was because — I was *not* sure that I loved him. It was all so sudden and strange."

Was this girl acting? Never in her life had Madame Grenville been more puzzled.

"And so you proposed that he should wait," the lady went on, scornfully; "but you did not let him slip out of your net. You were quite too wary for that."

"He is free;" and Queenie did not quail beneath the glance of those eagle eyes. "If I loved him as people sometimes do, I should be brave enough to marry him in the face of all opposition."

She rose and stood before her, conquering by her simple truth, with honor written in every line of her face.

"Pardon me, my child," Madame Grenville hurriedly said. "It is so seldom that young women of your class have any sentiment of honor or propriety that you must excuse my

astonishment, my incredulity. I recognize that you are superior to your station in this respect; and since you do *not* love my grandson, — though I must say that you have inspired him with a most positive belief in your regard, — we may be able to discuss the matter more amicably. I can truly say that such a marriage would not only be terrible to us, but to him."

The young girl made no answer. The elder continued, after a moment's pause —

"Doubtless you are aware that the Grenvilles have not only wealth, but birth and station. Ours is one of the pure old Southern families, who are truly the nobility of the land. It has been kept the more exclusive because any offence against its purity, such as a *mes alliance*, has been at once interdicted, and the offenders disowned. My husband discarded his only daughter for marrying the man of her choice, who was not approved by him. She died miserably, in poverty and exile. Had there been children they would have been placed in some institution, and brought up in the sphere of life their unfortunate mother selected for them."

Queenie shivered a little at the thought of this terrible, obdurate man.

"Harry's father was not so forgetful of the duty he owed his family. He is dead, or I think Harry would hardly have dared to venture upon such a step. But his grandfather's pride is in no whit abated. To-day the punishment would be just as swift."

She studied the fair young face keenly in this pause. It was immovable, so she resumed :

"You could marry him privately. He is of age, and can throw off authority, family ties, the affection of those who have loved him so long and so well. But his wife would never, *never* be received by any member of the family. She would estrange him from those who had the first claim; she would not only drag him to her own level, but condemn him to the bitter straits of poverty. His educa-

tion is such as befits a gentleman, only — you would not be as helpless yourself, as he would in such a position. If you married him, and he lost everything else, when he felt the need of the luxuries, the ease and delight of his past life, the love that has surrounded him since his very birth, the friends, the society, everything in fact, could your brief passion make amends? Nay, he would turn and curse you for having thus destroyed his life."

Queenie saw the vivid picture. In a dim way she had dreamed it over, and doubted if she could make amends for all he must lose.

"That would be the result. I place it before you so that you may see it, and have no ignorance to plead afterward. And now, if you are truly in earnest in wisely refusing him, I think I can make it worth your while to do so. You would not become rich by marrying him, for the fortune is in his grandfather's hands, and Harry has two sisters. I know he will seek to persuade you that the offence may be condoned, but you must see yourself that so public a character as a stage-dancer would bring —" disgrace, she was about to say, then softened it to "obloquy both to him and yourself."

"But I am *not* going to marry him!" cried Queenie, roused to a sense of indignation. "I think," falteringly, "that he loves me —"

"Oh, that is pure nonsense!" was the stinging retort. "Men feel privileged to make love to a pretty girl in your position, and are wild enough to promise anything. I doubt if a year from this time the foolish boy would feel inclined to keep his word. It is only in the beginning of these romantic affairs that a man swears to be true. He has had fancies before."

"Then you are answered," said Queenie, with a haughtiness that matched Madame Grenville's own. "I decline his offer, not from any fear of his ceasing to care for me, not because I do not believe he has the courage to give up

a life of wealth and ease, if he had to choose between that and happiness, but because I cannot love him sufficiently to make amends for such a sacrifice. Will you tell him this?"

"I will indeed, if you will promise not to see him again;" and Madame Grenville glanced up eagerly.

"I shall make no promise." Queenie had the sense not to play out her trump-card to her enemy.

"Well, Miss Barretti, I have nothing to do with your motive," said the handsome old lady, burning with vexation at the girl's higher pride, so utterly unassailable. "No sensible girl, in your position, would marry a young man who was sure to be made a beggar by the crazy step, while there was higher game in the world. We are all true to our order, I suppose. There is more in birth than people imagine. But I came prepared to reward you for this small sacrifice, if I could persuade you to make it. You really deserve something, my good girl;" and she opened her handsome reticule, fragrant with oriental odors.

Queenie drew back, and stood erect, her eyes flashing fire, her face instinct with a dignity that could not be mistaken, while the insulted blood surged to her face in a bright, passionate flood.

"Madame Grenville, it is not in your power to reward me. Our interview has lasted long enough," and the clear, cold tones struck the elder woman like a voice from some dim, half-forgotten past. Of whom did this girl, standing there in her peerless beauty, her indescribable grace, and conscious honor remind her? It was as if she had gone through some such scene before.

"Very well." Madame Grenville rose and drew herself up to her proudest height. It had all been so different from her fancy. She was to find a bright, coarse, underbred girl, who would assert her claim noisily, and declare with passionate eagerness that no power on earth would induce her to relinquish her lover. The lady had come prepared to bid high, to offer a tempting present as

a solace for the wound she inflicted. Her money was to buy the girl. She was to arrange some story that would not only shock, but shatter her grandson's faith in this charmer. She knew well that if Harry Grenville could see her this moment he would be more madly in love than ever.

The two confronted each other in a peculiar mood. Queenie felt herself wronged and outraged, and whereas, yesterday, she stood in awe of the very shadow of the Grenville family, now she felt only contempt. This regal woman—she was that in any attire—did not in the least intimidate her. Even her sneers and flings were robbed of their power to sting keenly. Were these people so much above her by the accident of wealth only? Was there not a higher nobility that could take cognizance of worthy deeds?

And Madame Grenville found it quite impossible to despise her humble rival. She felt intuitively that she had not impressed her with the sense of grandeur with which she fancied she could extinguish the dancing-girl. She had not won any great victory. Indeed, it was somewhat as if she had been vanquished.

"I have your promise," she said with a sudden fear, as if after all it might be delusive. "You will keep it, surely? If you should ever need a friend, or meet with any misfortune—"

"I should not apply to Madame Grenville;" and Queenie opened the door, bowing her out with the grace of royal blood.

Once in the street, Madame Grenville stood astounded. Never had she conducted any affair so poorly. She had bound Miss Barretti by no promise of secrecy, she had arranged no plausible tale, indeed, she *had* been vanquished altogether. What should she say to Harry? Would it not be better to go back—

No, she would not exchange words with the insolent little thing again. This boldness came of stage life, this

obtuseness, that could in no wise discriminate, was a characteristic of her class. Let Harry dare to marry her, and not all the love they held for him unitedly could purchase his redemption.

Queenie closed the door after her uninvited guest, and in that instant all her bravery seemed to desert her. She ran up-stairs, and throwing herself upon the bed, gave way to a flood of hysterical weeping. Now that she had relinquished her lover, bound herself by a solemn promise, she seemed to understand suddenly what she had thrown out of her life. The tenderness, the care, the devotion, the sweet dream he had pictured! Would any one ever love her again in that fashion? For to youth, in the moment of its supreme anguish, nothing can be paralleled.

She was so weary that presently she sobbed herself asleep. Miss Madeira, wondering at her absence, mounted the stairs to find her there with the beauty of a grieved child in her face, something that touched her and roused her curiosity concerning the recent visitor.

Some time after, the voices of the children startled her, and she sprang up. What was the matter — asleep here at midday! Oh —

Moppet put her head in the door.

"Auntie Madeira said — oh Queenie, there's the elegantest lady down-stairs, or ought I to say the most elegant? Yes, I believe that's right, and a handsome young gentleman, and Tip'll be awfully jealous, I know, for he wishes you never could have any lovers, but I think they're splendid, sending you flowers and everything, and I was to give you this —" studying the card in her hand, "but auntie Madeira said if you were asleep you should not be disturbed, but you are not, and it is from — Dolly Denzil."

Queenie held out her hand, while the crimson blood suffused her face, then, retreating, left it ashy pale, and the rosebud mouth quivered convulsively. Had Harry Grenville brought Madame Denzil to help him plead his cause?

The card contained this message :

"Dear Queenie — I have brought you a strange visitor, and you must prepare yourself for a somewhat dramatic denouement. May I come up and assist you a little ? "

"Will you bring Madame Denzil up-stairs, Moppet ? Do you know who is with her ? "

Queenie gasped as she asked the question, almost understanding what the answer would be.

"No," answered Moppet, with a sort of innocent stare. "But they came in a splendid carriage."

"Run along then, dear."

Madam Denzil's pretty light silk rustled up the stairs. She took Queenie in her arms, and kissed her rapturously.

"Who is it ? " faltered the young girl.

"When I tell you that his name is Mr. Roger Lasselle, you will be no wiser than before," she laughed. And then she caught Queenie to her heart, and cried over her.

"I'm a fool, I know ! I can't help it. I've heard no end of romances in my day, and those on the stage are not half as queer as those off of it. I can't tell you a word, nor a line, and the person whose right it is, is dying to see you, and to tell you ; and here I am keeping you when every moment is precious, and you must get yourself up beautifully, regardless of expense. Have you been asleep, you queer little kitten ? Why — you're all tumbled about. Haven't you a pretty white gown of some sort, and here, let me brush out your hair while I'm talking nonsense, just to keep back the great secret."

"I don't understand you a bit ; " cried Queenie, more amazed than ever, while her great, soft eyes studied Madame Denzil.

"No, my dear. If you did I should want to go out and hang myself on the first lamp-post, from pure chagrin. My business is to be as mysterious as the third act of a play, to excite your curiosity, your anxiety, your whole soul. Are you really awake ? Get me a bit of blue ribbon, and

oh, here are some violets in my belt. When I have your hair arranged — ”

“ Will you tell me one thing; ” Queenie exclaimed, almost frantically. “ Mr. Grenville — ”

“ Mr. Grenville has nothing to do about it. I may venture to say that it is some one who saw you long ago, and brings — well, not bad news. ”

“ Oh, it isn't Mr. Chippenham ! ” she cried in affright.

Dolly laughed heartily.

“ It isn't any one you ever knew, but some one who has heard a great deal about you, and who wants — there, that's pretty enough for a picture. What magnificent hair you have ! No, it must hang just so. Have you a decent dress, I wonder ? See here, put on this blue silk skirt — and if you have a pretty sacque — the blue body is too much like full dress. I want you to be picturesque, striking, and yet with an air of refined negligence. I have been expecting young Grenville — you know it is nothing until I give my consent, and now — oh, this white is just the thing. There, take a look at yourself. ”

“ But what *am* I to do ? ” she asked in a maze.

“ You are to go down-stairs and be introduced to Mr. Roger Lasselle. When you have listened to his story — ”

“ Oh, I cannot ! I cannot ! ” and Queenie hid her face. “ I will never have a lover again, never. ”

“ This isn't a love story, child. And having heard it, you will thank God that such things could come to pass in the compass of one small life. Now, my darling Queenie — will you ever forget that I have loved you, too ? ” and the tone was full of tender solemnity.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ROGER'S QUEST.

It seemed to Roger Lasselle, waiting in that small apartment, strewn with chaos, which had been designated as the "manager's den," that Madame Denzil must be a myth of the dark ages. He was considering the propriety of beating a retreat, when in flashed a pretty, coquettish woman of thirty, or thereabouts.

Roger stated his errand simply and tersely. If this Mam'selle Zanfretti should prove to be the identical Queen Titania, adopted child of Signor Barretti — "

"Well, if she should?" inquired Madame Denzil, looking steadily at him, after having evaded the question several times.

"I am certain it must be the same! Oh, Madame Denzil, if you have a heart, and have heard her story, you surely will not stand in the way of her being united to friends who have lost her and mourned her as dead."

"Mrs. Kate Chippenham, for instance;" was the rather ironical retort.

"Mrs. Chippenham for one. But there are others."

Dolly Denzil was annoyed, and incredulous. The episode of the party still rankled in her mind, and she did not mean that Queenie should be exposed to any fresh danger. This young man was very handsome, and carried himself courteously, but he might have gained some knowledge of Queenie to use to the child's detriment.

There was in it all an undercurrent of worldly wisdom to be used for her favorite. A marriage with such a person as Harry Grenville would lift Queenie out of the life

so illy adapted to her sweet, unsullied youth, her beauty, and her childlike faith. If she never lost it — if she could go to comfort and happiness at once, for although Dolly knew the young man's family would oppose such a union bitterly, if they were once married, vexed questions would be at an end, and reconciliation the work of time. She was not, therefore, going to give Harry Grenville so powerful a rival for Queenie's admiration.

I think he convinced her, at last, that there was no selfish motive at the bottom of his desire. She would not answer him positively, but made an engagement for him to call on her the following morning.

He went home wonderfully light of heart, this Roger Lasselle. It was as much as he could do not to cry out gladly in the hall, "I have found her, aunt Alice! I have found her!" to go to bed quietly; but there was little sleep for him. In the dreamy dimness he saw her again, floating up those cloud-like stairs, twinkling in the airy mazes until one could hardly tell whether she was human, or a veritable sprite.

"And if *I* should find her!" rang exultantly through his brain.

It seemed so odd the next morning to study the advertisement. Now he hoped she would not see it. Lawrence talked about the tickets; they would be quite a party. Uncle Edward rallied them a little. Then they dispersed, and Roger sauntered through the streets, consulting his watch every five minutes.

He rang Madame Denzil's door-bell promptly at eleven. He was sure he would find Queenie here. But he was doomed to a double disappointment. Madame Denzil had remembered an important engagement, and would not be in until twelve. Would he wait?

There was nothing else to do, he thought, grimly. He turned over photographs, — there was none of Queenie.

The engravings came next, the curiosities were inspected, and then he settled himself to a book of poems.

She entered brilliant and good-humored, and, at the sight, Roger nearly lost his temper. She ordered some wine and a dainty impromptu lunch, and then the two skirmished until she had wearied out Roger with being so warily on the defensive, and he had told her the whole story.

Dolly Denzil sat there astounded. Little Queenie a great lady, an heiress, with a father waiting to clasp her to his heart. And yet these sad, sad years had fallen in her life!

"Come," she said, rising, "there is not a moment to lose," and Roger noticed that her eyes were full of tears. "If I doubted you a little at first, pardon me. It was for her sake. I can't fancy myself being mother to a grown girl," and a smile crossed her face, "but I could love Queenie as a child."

They obtained a coupe, and drove rapidly to the house. Roger noted the common surroundings of his little fairy queen, for already she seemed to belong to him. Was he not the prince come to carry her away?

It appeared to him as he sat in the stuffy little parlor that there had been nothing but waiting on this day, when his soul was hot with ardor and impetuosity. He heard the children's voices—the little ones she had saved from starvation, the steps going up and down-stairs, then a baby's cry, and afterward the door opened.

"This is Miss Barretti," said Madame Denzil, leading the shy girl forward. "And this, Queenie, is Mr. Lasselle, who has come from a very dear friend, and has a story to tell you. I think you will do better by yourselves;" and she disappeared.

Roger had taken Queenie's hand, so fair and soft with the freshness of youth, as if it had never known labor. And then he studied the face with one long, ardent, de-

vouring glance. Yes, it was she. The portrait, the daring child acrobat, the beautiful girl before him, — there could be no question of identity. Through every stage of growth ran the same remarkable likeness.

"This advertisement will partly explain my coming," he said, handing her the paper, with the notice folded outside.

She glanced over it, and gave a wild cry of joy.

"Kate, dear Kate! Where is she? May I not see her?" and for an instant the room swam round.

"You shall see her. I brought her from Europe with me, and she is now in my aunt's house."

"But how did you know —" and she turned a blushing, questioning face toward him.

"May I tell you my own story in my own way? It seems as if I had always known you."

She smiled, that rare, sweet smile, that set all his pulses athrill. Formality was at an end between them.

"Sit down here."

He led her to the uncomfortable sofa, but it was to him a throne of delight. He began at the summer afternoon, that seemed ages ago, when he had been wild with boyish delight at her own and Signor Barretti's performance. Then all his after efforts at tracing her, even to his call on Mrs. Winstead.

A puzzled look came over her face. Why had he taken all this trouble? She did not dare ask; she did not even venture to glance up, but just listened to the flow of the rich, melodious voice, and the account of the persevering search.

"Let me tell you another story," he said, after a pause. "Nine years ago this coming summer, a woman and a child stood on Broadway, nearly opposite City Hall, waiting for an opportunity to cross. They essayed it, but after going half the distance the child was seized with a sudden panic, and flew back, or disappeared in the crowd —"

"It was I!" she cried, eagerly. "And the woman was

my nurse, my dear Maggie! My own mamma was dead. Oh! — ” and she drew a long, sobbing breath.

“ Shall I go on ? ”

Her soft, starry eyes, swimming in tears, answered him.

“ She met with a terrible accident. ” And then he continued the sad tale; the efforts which were made to find her, and the incidents that frustrated them.

Queenie listened as if it must be about some one else. She could not imagine it had been for her own self.

“ Oh, I remember it all! It is like a horrible dream. Tim, and that dreadful mother Mell! And the dark, prison-like place she took me to, the man who was so very, very repulsive! ” and she shuddered. “ Then my dear Dick Bridger carried me away. ”

“ We have all the story complete. One by one the links have been joined. And now it only remains to take you to the friends who are waiting so impatiently. ”

With rare delicacy he had left out all mention of her father, though he had spoken of the picture. He saw that this most important of Maggie's charges had passed out of her childish mind, been dimmed by the after events and scenes. It should be the delight of aunt Alice to impart this.

Queenie was lost in a reverie. Was it true? Was it she who had lived this changing, eventful life? Ah, what strange, strange years!

He studied her unobserved. The shining hair, the pearly skin, with its delicate pink tints, the high-bred, exquisitely fine features, the large, tender eyes, with their drooping, blue-veined lids, the sweet, ripe, tremulous lips, — oh, how lovely, how pure! How had she escaped scatheless?

“ And you are Roger! ” she said, suddenly, glancing up with a swift, bright look, as if it had just dawned upon her.

“ Roger! ” She said it so simply, so unconsciously. He had told so much of the story in the third person, and it

had been so bewildering that only now had she seemed to connect the eager, impetuous boy, with the man beside her.

For an instant their eyes met. He was hardly conscious of the admiration, the sense of mastery, the imperious desire for ownership that was but dimly veiled in their tender glow. And she could but yield as unconsciously. The little fairy Queen Titania, by right, belonged to the boy Roger, who had sought her so faithfully, who had not been deterred or alarmed by the coarse associations clinging about her position. It was all so far away, like a picture seen ages ago, that boy and girl.

She had breathed a long, soft sigh, and her eyes drooped, a wavering color, like the twilight tint of flame stole over her face.

He was so entranced that he could have sat and watched her for hours, still he was all impatience, on the other hand, to take her home.

"And now," he began, with a gay, sweet smile, "you will not be afraid to trust yourself to me, if my story does savor of the wildest romance. I have succeeded in convincing Madame Denzil of the truth of my claim to you. My aunt and Maggie, as well as Mrs. Chippenham, are waiting impatiently, though little expecting that the moment of your arrival is so near at hand. Can you go immediately?"

"Oh, I must tell dear Miss Madeira! And it is all so strange. Your aunt —"

"Will prove the tenderest of mothers. No, you must not wait; you can come back and tell Miss Madeira."

Madame Denzil had found her way down to the kitchen, and astounded simple-hearted Miss Madeira with the wonderful history. At the summons, they both made their appearance.

It had all the unreality of a play to Queenie. Miss Madeira's tears and smiles and congratulations, with more than her usual incoherence, the brief drive, the yielding to

Roger, as if he was the arbiter of her destiny, — indeed, Madame Denzil went quite over to the enemy, and forgot the claims of the absent lover, — the being handed out so courteously in front of this handsome mansion, where Dolly kissed her and left her, and then almost carried up the broad, thickly-carpeted stairs.

No one was in the front sitting-room.

"Here is the portrait," Roger said, a wild kind of joy making his voice unsteady. "There, stand and look at it; don't stir till I bring some one. Why, you have scarcely changed."

With a bound he was in the adjoining room.

"Aunt Alice! — Maggie!" Oh, how could he ever get the joyful news told?

"Why, Roger, what has happened?"

"Oh, she is here! she is here!" he cried. "In this house, in the next room! I found her last night! I was so sure, I could not sleep. That is why I could eat no breakfast. Little Queenie! — that seems the best name for her. Oh, where is Mrs. Chippenham? But you will all know her by the picture. Come."

She stood there with her shy, downcast eyes, her fair hair fluttering about her shoulders, her hands clasped, — a statue could hardly have been more perfect, more entrancing. The two women looked, in awesome wonder, that amounted to incredulity.

Suddenly there was a cry, a quick rush, and Kate had her in her arms.

"Oh, my darling, darling Queenie!"

It broke the spell. Kate dropped into a low chair, and took Queenie on her lap, as if she had still been a child, kissing the sweet face with rapture, calling her by all the old, endearing names, and then breaking into a fit of tender sobbing.

Maggie looked on with jealous love, and a great pang. The sweet, pretty, imperious baby Nora was no more.

That past seemed as dead now as if Nora had never come back.

But it was Roger's electric voice that brought them back to every day life, — Roger, who talked and explained and bridged over the spaces, and settled everything to everybody's satisfaction. And in the midst of it all walked in Mr. Byington.

As for Queenie, the events and excitements of the day had been quite too much. She finished by fainting dead away, and was put in Mrs. Byington's bed, with Maggie to watch her.

And then she thought of the evening. She could not go to the theatre. She never could go again, never face that great audience, whose applause had been so much to her. And yet Mr. Ritchie must know.

She sat up, presently, and wrote a little note to Madame Denzil, enclosing one to Harry Grenville. Its contents were these:—

"MY DEAR FRIEND: I have gained courage enough to examine my own heart, and have come to this resolve. The fancy that has grown up between us has been so brief that we can both overlive it, which will be the wisest course. Madame Grenville called upon me this morning; she is, no doubt, right in her judgment. Whatever may happen to me, it cannot take away the knowledge that I have been a public performer, a stage dancer. So it is wisest and best to forget me utterly.

"With this I shall disappear from your sight. Do not seek me. Miss Madeira and Madame Denzil are alike pledged to secrecy for the present. I am safe and with dear friends.

TITANIA BARRETTI."

Queenie read the note over. Was it heartless as well as cold? But though these friends stood ready to make the rest of life brighter, she was still, in the sense of birth, an outcast, a little waif. Indeed, she had reached a quiet but

painful certainty of her mother's history. A deceived and deserted woman, no doubt, and she was much too proud to enter the Grenville family as an interloper, a thing to be blamed and despised.

Roger had gone with the notes. For the present the matter was to be kept a profound secret. The advertisement was withdrawn. The house seemed so quiet after this heat and whirl of excitement.

Maggie came back to her station. Kate sat at the foot of the bed, and Mrs. Byington was engaged with a visitor in the drawing-room.

Queenie laughed a little at the solemnity of the situation. To her it had a ridiculous side. She felt weak and languid, but she was not ill; indeed, the brief hours rest had restored her.

"I feel as if I ought to get up," she said, presently. "Kate, am I not a little humbug? But I am still so much in a maze. I wish you'd tell your story all over again, Maggie. How sweet and kind Mrs. Byington has been! And there are so many lovely people in the world."

Somewhere Maggie made a hiatus. Queenie was thinking.

"Maggie," — a little tremulously, — "didn't we come to New York to find my father? I can't seem to remember very well. I suppose there never was anything heard —"

Maggie buried her face suddenly on the pillow, and sobbed. Who could tell her that most wonderful of all the strange incidents.

"I think I know, dear Maggie. Don't be so distressed," whispered the sweet voice, softly. "It would be so nice to have had a father one could remember fondly, but there are so many other things that I can be quite content. Poor, poor, mamma. If I could have her now, I would comfort her, and help her bear the sorrow."

"Oh, Nora, it is no sorrow, not as you think." Then, as Mrs. Byington entered the room, she implored that lady to tell her all.

Mrs. Byington bent over and kissed the fair face, clasped the soft hands.

"Queenie," she said, "I wonder if you can bear one more joy? You have a father, who adores your memory, who has spared no pains to find you. He is in Rome now, but to-morrow the summons will be on its way to him. He is an artist of considerable reputation, and a nobleman, Baron Waldeburgh. So you are a titled little lady."

She thought of her letter — gone! Was she sorry?

"There!" cried Kate, exultantly. "Though one doesn't think so much of lords, and counts, and barons, when one sees such droves of them at German watering-places, gambling for a living. But you're a lady born! You always *were* different, Dick himself said so. I never saw him love any human being so much! Poor, dear Dick. And then, that I should have let that mean, sneaking, drunken Chippenham, get around me, and take all the money, and hiring you out, too! Oh, Queenie, if Dick could come back he would murder me, I know! He always said I was a fool, but I've been worse than a fool!"

A father! Baron Waldeburgh! Queenie wondered how it would seem to have a father. She could only think of the lovely little children she used to watch in Central Park, lifted in the arms of some tender father, or the bearded cheek pressed against the soft pink one. But now she was a woman.

"He painted your portrait, in the other room," said Maggie. "And he is a very charming gentleman."

Queenie lay there and listened. Afterward Roger came flying up the stairs. She sat up on the sofa, and wanted to hear what had happened at the theatre.

"Well, Ritchie was tearing, for awhile! Madame Denzil, with a funny twinkle in her eye, made you out terribly sick and exhausted. The part was divided round; that little Norton girl took the cloud scene, and did it pretty well, too; but I fancy the audience was puzzled, and missed

you, though she wore a golden wig to personate you as nearly as possible. I didn't wait after that. Lal and Miss Grenville were there."

Miss Grenville! Queenie caught the name, and flushed deeply. Harry had by this time received her note. It might all be taken back. That grand old woman would not spurn her now, if she knew what had occurred since that terrible morning interview. Why, it seemed ages ago!

Would she be glad to have her proud, handsome lover again? A shiver sped through her warm pulses, and she shrank from the fancied clasp. Ah, how weak she had been, to let him love her when she could give only gratitude in return.

The last picture that floated through her brain that night was Dick Bridger and herself at Branchville. She could see the bright, boyish Roger watching every movement with his intense eyes, applauding — loth to leave, remembering her for months afterward, never, in fact, forgetting her.

When Queenie woke the next morning, she was amazed at not finding herself in Miss Madeira's little room, with its worn carpet and cheap belongings. Here was luxury instead. Maggie came in to brush her hair, her shining, silken hair, that had once been so ruthlessly despoiled by the cruel hands of Mrs. Winstead. And here was a pretty white morning wrapper, that fell around her feet in a graceful train. For Queenie was still petite, and would be a sylph rather than a Juno.

Mrs. Byington entered, and caught the fair girl to her heart. How radiantly beautiful she was! How she had longed for and coveted this very child, since the ill-fated day of the accident! And now, if she might only keep her! If Lal, — and she gave a sigh, but there was Roger, — who cried out from the hall below,

"Are you *never* going to bring her down, Maggie!"

Yes, that would settle it. Roger was worthy of any woman, even a baron's daughter.

She entered the breakfast room on Mrs. Byington's arm, a trifle shy, but graceful and self-possessed, her bright young face a picture to make glad any human soul. They thought little about her beauty at Miss Madeira's, but they had all felt its subtle charm hundreds of times. But she shone now like a gem transferred to a rare setting. For any visible awkwardness or strangeness she might have spent her whole life among these polished and cultured people. Was it the underlying grace of birth?

They were so happy, so bright and joyous, and yet on the very verge of such intense emotion, that now and then a pair of eyes glittered in something beside their own brilliancy, and a voice trembled with a strange depth and fulness.

There was still so much talking to do, but they all agreed that at present the most profound secrecy must be observed. If the story should become public now, Queenie would be irretrievably committed to her social status as a dancer in the Enchanted Princess. There were just two more representations for that day, and then it would be replaced, forgotten.

"I think I had better write to Mr. Ritchie," said Queenie, "and relinquish my salary for the past fortnight, which would be due on Monday. That will help make amends."

Roger laughed at her conscientiousness, but announced himself ready to be her messenger anywhere within reasonable limits.

"And if I could see Miss Madeira. Oh, I ought to go home —"

"Why, this is your home," declared Roger, with an air of authority that was at once fascinating and amusing. "Tell her, aunt Alice, —"

"We shall only relinquish her to her father's care and love," said Mr. Byington, in a deep, full tone, that touched

her heart. "We have not searched so long and vainly to let her go out of our sight again. There would be some new and remarkable combination of events immediately."

"You are all so good! And you took so much trouble before you knew —"

"But, my dear, we never half forgave ourselves for the accident. I think we can venture to do so now. But Roger is right. This is your home."

"We will visit Miss Madeira and Madame Denzil this morning," exclaimed Mrs. Byington. "I want to see and thank this worthy woman for taking you into her home and heart. And we must see about a wardrobe. Maggie, will you order the carriage?"

Queenie flushed, bewitchingly.

Their first errand was to one of the emporiums of fashion. Queenie was amazed at the lavish manner in which Mrs. Byington made her selections. Soft silks, cashmeres, lawns, linens, pretty embroideries, laces, gloves; indeed, it was a study to watch the lovely, eager, girlish face. Roger had insisted upon accompanying them. He displayed the slender white hand with as much pride as if he had been its veritable owner, and selected gloves until Queenie implored him to desist.

"And now, aunt Alice," he began, laughingly, "I think we ought to buy a gift all round for Miss Madeira's household. How many children are there, Miss Queenie?"

They did not go empty handed. It was Saturday, and all the children were home but Tip. Queenie kissed them and cried over them, and then laughed in her soft, clear tone. But oh, how could they ever give her up!

Miss Madeira took one occasion to whisper to Queenie,

"Mr. Grenville was here early this morning, my dear, and he's most wild about you. I told him what you said, that you were safe and with friends; but he begged so for your address that I was glad not to have it, for I never could have kept my word."

"Thank you. It is best so," the young girl murmured.

"I have been so happy with them—you never would believe," Queenie exclaimed, when she was settled in the carriage again, and was wiping the tears from her tender brown eyes. "They are not pretty, nor especially refined, but oh, we have all been such dear, dear friends. And my poor Miss Madeira."

"How could they help loving you!" cried Roger, with honest frankness.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IF I COULD WIN YOU BACK!

THE blow had fallen so suddenly upon Harry Grenville that even now he could hardly believe it anything beyond a terrible dream. He had gone to the theatre as usual, and been astounded by Queenie's mysterious note. Then he had flown to Madame Denzil, to find her as impenetrable as a Sphinx.

"She is too ill to appear to-night. For the rest, be patient. You will know in time," was the lady's message.

"But I *must* see her. I shall seek her at once," he answered, with resolute determination.

"She is not at Miss Madeira's. All you can do is to be patient."

He hurried to the small, obscure abode. Not a light was visible at any window. Then he went straight home to his hotel.

His mother had gone to bed with a headache. Lucia was out spending the night with a friend. Blanche had gone to the theatre with Lawrence Byington. He had been asked to join them, but his own engagements were too absorbing.

His grandfather always retired early, being in very delicate health. Madame Grenville sat alone by the handsome inlaid cabinet. She had been looking over bills, and making arrangements. Next week they were to leave the city. A cottage at Newport awaited them, and once there they could plan other summer tours. It would take her grandson away from the danger.

Harry entered the room quietly. His fair, high-bred

face was deadly pale, but the light of resolution shone in his eyes.

"Why, Harry!" and she started.

He laid the note before her.

"You were the cause of this being written," he said, in a sharp voice, that seemed to cleave the very air. "You saw Miss Barretti this morning. What did you do or say that she should have hidden herself, that she should be ill."

"I? Miss Barretti ill!"

"Grandmother, you do know. She is not at the theatre to-night. If you think to interfere,—if you have driven her away, I warn you that I will search the whole world over for her, and marry her. If you choose that grand-papa shall disinherit me, let him then! There are ways in which I can make my own living, and by the heaven above, I will, for her sake!"

"And you set your whole family at naught for this coarse, common theatre-dancer, who cares for nothing besides your money! You break my heart, your mother's, you bring disgrace upon your sisters, you kill your dear old grandfather, whose very life is centred in you! Take that step, Harry Grenville, and you become a murderer!"

Her voice was low, but telling in its intensity. The handsome old face seemed to take on a more terrible beauty, as if she were some Sibyl uttering a fateful prediction.

"What did you say to her? Tell me the whole truth. How dared you go!"

"I could dare greater things, Harry, to save you from the clutches of an evil-minded, designing girl. And Harry," with a cruel smile in the keen eyes, "I penetrated her motive. When I told her that your family would surely disown you, I struck the key-note of her shameful avarice. She was willing to give you up. She promised readily enough. I went prepared to buy off her claim. I was not

even compelled to do that. Ah, poor foolish boy! Did she blind you by her specious arts, and make you believe she loved you?"

There was a withering scorn in Madame Grenville's voice, a gleam of pitying contempt in her eyes. It stung her grandson to the quick.

"It is you who are wrong, mistaken!" he cried with passionate earnestness. "You who have so poorly read her noble soul. She knew but little of my circumstances, she never questioned, she was reluctant to be bound for fear —"

"She was both wise and wary. Women of that stamp learn these tricks in their cradles. Believe me or not, I had little trouble in persuading her to give you up. And look at this letter! Does it breathe one sentence of passionate, despairing love? The '*fancy*' between you — that was all it ever became to her. She liked your gifts, the money you lavished on her."

"You are mistaken there," was the bitter reply. "She would take nothing from me but flowers. She was honor and delicacy itself."

"Harry, I cannot expect you to listen to reason now. I will give you the credit of being very much in love. You have a generous, unsuspecting nature. I saw at a glance where this girl, with her assumption of baby guilelessness, had worked upon your soul, how easily she had taken you captive, where a man of larger experience would have been wary. I wanted to see her to judge for myself. If she had been capable of elevation, of refinement —"

"She was refinement itself!" he interrupted angrily.

"If she had been capable of gracing a different sphere," continued Madame Grenville, "my task would have been much more difficult. For even then I could not have consented to receive a ballet-dancer as a grand-daughter, to place her low, vulgar associations beside your sisters, who have been so carefully guarded from all evil. Harry, think

a moment, my own darling boy! Something is due to your family, your position. Would you marry a woman of whose antecedents you must be forever ashamed, a woman who could never be tolerated anywhere in refined society!"

"Her antecedents! Grandmamma, she went on the stage three months ago, to save a whole family from starvation. Their father, who is a sea-captain, was reported lost, and their aunt has been ill for months. She had a wonderful genius for dancing. It was very noble, I think; but does a few months' employment change one's very being?"

"We will not argue the point, Harry. You are angry and disappointed, and of course unreasonable. If it came to an open issue, which I pray heaven to avert, you would have to choose between us. We never could or would receive her. Both of your sisters will marry, and Grenville will not be likely to go a-begging for heirs. For the rest I assure you, when I left Miss Barretti, she said nothing of any change of abode. This is some plan of her own—"

"And you did not ask her to go away?"

"I pledge you my solemn word, Harry, that the subject was not mentioned between us;" and she met his steady gaze unflinchingly. "She gave you up so readily that I asked nothing more. Study this note, and I think you will see that she had some designs of her own. She was not at the theatre, you say; and the play is to be taken off to-morrow? Then she has gone out of the city with some one."

"But she was ill! Madame Denzil said so."

"Ill! The picture of robust health this morning, and able to go away this afternoon, certainly;" and Madame Grenville laughed rather derisively.

Harry bit his lip with pain and anger. He had not been treated justly, he began to think. Could she not have said one tender word?

He flung himself out of the room without even a good-night, his very soul torn with passionate anguish. But find her he would, if it took years. She should explain all this mystery. He must hear from her own lips that she no longer loved him, and oh, she could never say that!

His efforts the next day were fruitless. Madame Denzil was so divided between him and Roger that she hesitated to strengthen his passion, if, as Queenie intimated, it could bring nothing but misery. Even she did not know the full particulars respecting the absent father.

There was nothing then but patience, that much-derided but hardest of all virtues. And meanwhile plans went on. Trunks were packed and sent; a servant dispatched to attend to the cottage. Blanche was the only one who found the city tolerable, for already the glowing sun began to prefigure summer heats. But how break into the rapture of this sweet love-dream — how endure separation, even for a brief while?

Mrs. Byington had not objected to the prospect of her son's early marriage. She had so longed for a daughter, and surely Blanche Grenville would have met and filled any requirements as to exterior. Tall and slender, with a graceful, willowy figure, laughing hazel eyes, and abundant shining brown hair, a face, if not critically beautiful, possessing many attractive points, and a manner eminently winsome. All winter the young people had seen a great deal of each other, and at last it had culminated in orthodox style. Parents' consent would be but a formula of respect. Lawrence did his part with sincerity and truth, and was received most cordially by the Grenville connection.

"I wish, mother dear, that you could spare sufficient time and interest from our new-found prize," Lawrence said, "to call on the Grenvilles with me. The last of the week they go to Newport. And I should like — I wish

they could come here. One of your delightful little dinners, for instance."

"Why, yes, my darling Lal. You are not to be forgotten in this wonderful daughter, whose own father must claim her presently. Indeed, I am delighted with Blanche, and she will find no grim, exacting mother-in-law in me. I want her to love me, Lal, and not be afraid or suspicious."

"She will, I am sure, when she comes to know you well. And, mamma mine, if we could arrange to go to Newport —"

"As well there as anywhere."

"And about the dinner?"

"When do they leave — on Friday? Would Wednesday be too soon? Why, I might go with you this very evening, if you desired, and give them the invitation."

"That will be the very thing. Let me order the carriage immediately. Dear mamma!" and Lawrence kissed her fondly.

There was a little pang at her heart, but she was too unselfish to show it. Marrying and being given in marriage was the way of the world, and she did rejoice in her son's happiness. So she made herself ready, and accompanied him.

Harry and Lucia were out, but the elders received Mrs. Byington with charming courtesy and cordiality. Blanche was shy and sweet, but her new mother elect took her to her heart at once. The call was shorn of anything like awkwardness and formality.

She gave her invitation, and it was accepted. Mr. Grenville rarely went out, but he would be very happy to make an exception in this case. And so the matter was settled.

"Edward," began Mrs. Byington when they were alone that evening, "while I was calling at the Grenvilles an odd idea struck me. Do you remember that Queenie's mother's name was Grenville, that she belonged to a wealthy South-

ern family, and eloped with Mr. Waldeburgh, being disowned for the act. What if — ”

“ Oh, my dear Alice, I strictly forbid your conjuring up another romance. Our little Queenie will think the main business of life is hunting up relatives. I am quite certain this old Mr. Grenville had only the one son, who is dead. There are three grandchildren — we never heard of any others.”

“ We should not be likely to, under such circumstances. It is rather curious. I wonder — but Maggie knew next to nothing.”

“ Do not trouble your wise little head about it. And say nothing to Queenie.”

No, she would not utter a word on the subject. Yet she could not dismiss the thought. And watching Queenie she fancied she discerned something of the same grace and dignity, that subtle family resemblance so elusive for description, but making itself felt in many ways.

Little Queenie! They all adopted the name so readily. It seemed just to fit her. And oh, how radiantly happy she was! Her wonderful grace of adaptiveness made her as much at home in this elegant house, with servants to wait on every turn, as she had been in Miss Madeira's simple cottage. All refined and cultured ways came to her instinctively.

“ She might have lived in a palace all her life,” said Roger admiringly to his aunt. “ Isn't it astonishing? And though she thinks she's fearfully ignorant, I wonder where she picked up so much knowledge! Why, we could take her anywhere without a bit of polishing. And then her lovely voice!”

She amazed Roger still more, one morning, by running over a rather difficult exercise very correctly.

“ Well, you are a marvel!” he exclaimed. “ Did you learn piano-playing in that fairy-ring, with the small people? I begin to think you a trifle uncanny.”

"Oh, don't laugh at me," and she raised her lovely eyes with that shy, deprecating look so absolutely bewitching; "I did have a teacher. And we had a piano."

"We? Who, pray tell! You have been in so many phases of existence."

"At Miss Madeira's." And then came out the story of the ill-fated piano.

"See here!" exclaimed Roger. "You don't mean that you are to lose all that money unless you redeem it by July? The fellow is a mean old hunk, anyhow. Now I'll tell you what we will do. You just put on a hat, and I'll order the carriage, and we will go and pay this bill, and have the piano sent back in a jiffy."

"You —" with startled surprise in every line of her sweet face.

"Yes. I have a Fortunatus purse — maybe you didn't know it? My dear, generous Fortunatus is in California, the best and loveliest prince in the wide world. I mean you to see him some day. And he thinks, funniest of all, that I am only a little boy yet, and can hardly be trusted away from aunt Alice's motherly wing, though I have been all over Europe. And so we will go out and try our enchantment on this piano."

It was the first time she had been out alone with him. He was so gay and fascinating that she listened to his bright sallies, and laughed, her own low, musical ripple.

When that business was satisfactorily adjusted they went to call on Miss Madeira, dear old Miss Madeira, who had cried more longing tears for Queenie than she would have liked to admit, though she gave thanks every hour for the good fortune. And then Roger declared he would bring the great family carriage around the next morning, and take out the whole host for a frolic.

What a grand, rare frolic it was! The children, Miss Madeira declared, were "let loose." Moppet did put on a few "big girl" airs, but Pug was too riotous, and the twins

so solemnly funny. They went round and round the drives, viewed the animals; they had a grand feast of refreshments; and it was two o'clock before Roger set them down at their own door.

"How very, very good you are to take so much trouble for —" and Queenie blushed enchantingly.

"A noisy crew of youngsters! And yet they are very 'likable.' How they all adore you. And that quaint Miss Madeira! Do you know I feel like screaming with laughter when she claps her decapitated sentences together, like the man did his dog, with two legs up and two legs down."

Queenie laughed, too.

"There, what are you thinking of now? You have the most wonderful face. Did you ever see a great field of waving grass or grain on a summer day, when some tiny cloud drifted over the sun? Here there will be a dimple of shade, there a bit of sun, and both rippling over it as if they were playing hide-and-seek. And that's just the way the beautiful changes go over your face," and Roger's glance seemed to devour it.

She was quite grave then.

"I was thinking," she said, "of the time when we first came to New York. I used to take the twins up to the Park in a baby-carriage, and watch the great people who went riding by, in their beautiful attire. And I used to plan that if I ever did get rich I'd stop by the wayside and take in some stray, forlorn child, and give it such a long, lovely ride. And now you have done it, — oh, Mr. Lasselle, I can never, never tell you how I appreciate your kindness," and the tears made limpid lakes of her tender eyes.

"See here," he said, much moved by the strand of pathos in her voice, "you have been adopted in the bosom of the family, and we can't help calling you Queenie; so you must say Roger, and Lal, and aunt Alice, and uncle Edward. Begin with Roger, won't you?"

A scarlet light flashed up in her face, and her eyes were shyly downcast. She said it softly, under her breath, and he almost guessed that she did by the quiver of the lips.

Aunt Alice scolded a little at Roger's keeping her out so long. Maggie wanted to alter a white dress, and there was to be company to dinner.

"Lal's betrothed," explained Roger; "so you see, Miss Queenie, you have a powerful rival in that young man's affections. He will have no eyes nor ears for any one but her, and I must take you in to dinner. Maggie, make her outshine everybody."

Queenie did not ask any questions. The sudden remembrance flashed over her that a week ago she too had a lover. Did she regret him?

Her heart was in a complex state. How much duty she owed Harry Grenville, now that she had the birth and wealth of his station, she could not decide. There was the taint of the stage still, and *that* his grandmother had so bitterly denounced. If she could only summon the requisite courage to confess to Mrs. Byington, and let her decide what would be right. Madame Denzil had gone to Chicago, Miss Madeira had been purposely left in ignorance of her abode. And every one was so completely engrossed with Queenie's affairs that Miss Grenville had not been discussed. On the other hand, Lawrence had been occupied with his fair betrothed, and her speedy departure, and their own interests were sufficient for them. Thus it happened that the name of Grenville had not been mentioned.

Queenie stood in the doorway, radiantly beautiful in her fine white organdie, with a pale-green sash and her loose-flowing curls fastened at the back with a knot of the same color, while at her throat was a cluster of pale pink rose-buds.

"Come," Roger said, quite entranced with her loveliness. "They are all here, and aunt Alice bade me

bring you down," slipping her unresisting hand through his arm.

She entered the spacious drawing-room unabashed. Here sat a pale, thin, aristocratic-looking old gentleman, a very picture, in a crimson velvet chair; a middle-aged, rather faded woman beside him, two tall, blooming girls — and then Queenie's breath came in a great frightened bound, and the room seemed full of glittering stars.

"Miss Waldeburgh," Mrs. Byington had announced. "Mr. Grenville, my dear," to Queenie, "Mrs. Grenville, Miss Grenville, and Miss Blanche, and" — turning her quite around — "Madame Grenville."

"Miss — who?" asked Madame Grenville, sharply, forgetting, in her amazement, her faultless breeding.

"Miss Waldeburgh," repeated Mrs. Byington, startled, in her turn, with the change in the face before her.

"Ah!" with a touch of scorn that bordered on insolence. "I think I have known Miss Waldeburgh under another name, several names, in fact. Are you aware —"

"Of more, doubtless, than you can tell me," answered Mrs. Byington, with stately composure. "This young girl has had a most singular history. Nine years ago she was lost in this city, and only last week was restored to her friends. Her father is an Austrian nobleman, at present in Rome; her mother, oddly enough, was named Grenville."

Madame Grenville turned frightfully pale, but stared at the two as if they had unearthed some fatal plot.

Mrs. Byington's voice had been low, but distinct. Mr. Grenville started suddenly and came forward, his slender form swaying with agitation.

"What are you saying, Madame — Waldeburgh? — And her mother's name Grenville? Impossible! I once had a daughter — child, let me look at you. Such a strange coincidence! But Sophia," — to his wife, — "you learned that she was dead. Yes. We had a public and legal announcement. And she left no children. Her two baby

boys died — her husband deserted her — there *must* be some mistake,” — and he glanced wildly at the three.

“If your daughter’s name was Ellen Grenville, she was surely Miss Waldeburgh’s mother. I have a servant in my family who lived with her, who saw her die, who brought the child to this city. Her father was languishing in a foreign prison on account of some political trouble. He has since been our guest, and we have found him an honorable and cultivated gentleman,” was Mrs. Byington’s concise explanation.

“My God, Sophia! How could this fearful mistake have occurred? Could I see this domestic, madame?” to Mrs. Byington.

“You will exert yourself too much,” and Madame Grenville seated him in a chair. He did seem exhausted.

“No, no; let me see her. I must know the truth. My child!” and he placed his trembling hand on Queenie’s shoulder.

“Nay, I insist,” exclaimed Madame Grenville. “Let Mrs. Byington tell her story. How or where did she find this child, and how could she identify it after so many years. We will not excite ourselves unduly.”

The others had crowded around Queenie and were studying her with unfeigned curiosity. She felt so strange among them, she understood in the depths of her soul that Madame Grenville was unfriendly, that if a look could annihilate, she would be swept out of existence. Then Roger came and placed his arm around her protectingly. Ah, if she might belong to him! She understood then who was keeper of her heart.

“The story is long, but I will try to go over it briefly,” Mrs. Byington said, feeling that there was some reason why Madame Grenville wished to exclude Queenie from the family circle. She repeated her side first, her interviews with Mr. Waldeburgh, and his errand abroad. He had been concerned in some political sympathy with Hun-

gary, and left his native land in consequence of it. Shortly after occurred his elopement with Miss Grenville. After the death of the little boys he had resolved to return to Austria for a fortune that awaited him, being advised that it was perfectly safe. He had been arrested and thrown into prison, was there, in fact, at the death of his wife, but released soon after, and returned to America, where every effort was made to find his daughter. Then she took up the startling changes that had befallen the child, the corroboration of all in the testimony of Tim Chafney, Kate Bridger, Miss Madeira, and Queenie's own remembrance.

At this point they were interrupted by the summons to dinner.

"Oh, you wonderful little being!" exclaimed Blanche, clasping her arms around Queenie impulsively. "What a strange, romantic history! And you are really our cousin! There can not be a doubt, grandpapa."

Madame Grenville went through the dinner with the stateliest dignity, but at heart she was stunned. "Oh, what a horrible blunder that of last week had been! If she had but let Harry and his affairs alone. And then —"

They could not see her thoughts. The strangeness was broken up, the young people were all interest and excitement. Old Mr. Grenville watched the beautiful girl, so much more radiantly lovely than his own daughter, and yet with a curious resemblance. They sat over the dessert half the evening, as if entranced by a magic spell.

Mr. Byington rose presently.

"Our little festivity," he began, "has had its complexion quite changed. We came together to-day more especially to ratify the proper ending of a lover's romance, to welcome a daughter to our heart and home, and to bid these two young people God speed in the new path they have chosen for themselves. It is one of those fortunate relations, entered into with the readiest consent of all con-

cerned, and God grant that you, Mrs. Grenville, may indeed find a son, as we shall find, what we have longed for so many years,—a daughter. I propose the health of Miss Blanche, and my son Lawrence.”

Lawrence was covered with blushing honors. Roger sprang up and made a bright answer in behalf of his cousin. They adjourned to the drawing-room, while Mr. Grenville and Maggie were closeted in the library for a long while.

“There can be no doubt,” said Mr. Grenville, as he rejoined the company. “Queenie, I am your grandfather. But I never so much as dreamed of your existence.”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MADAME GRENVILLE'S LAST STAKE.

THEY parted with much real warmth on the side of every one save Madame Grenville. This new relative had come in most inopportunistly.

Madame Grenville was a second wife. Mrs. Ogilvie and her daughter had met the Grenvilles at the Silver Springs one summer, and out of it had grown two matches. Not satisfied with this, she had tried to marry Ellen Grenville to a wealthy and somewhat dissolute bachelor, twice her age. Victor Waldeburgh, a young and handsome foreign exile, won her heart. He had birth, breeding, and education, but at present limited means, and was peremptorily refused.

Wisely or not, they had united their destinies. The prospect of gaining sufficient to keep his wife in comparative comfort had lured him to his native land, with what disastrous results the reader knows. Latterly an uncle had died, from whom he inherited a title, with the rocky, dilapidated barony of Waldeburgh, and another small fortune. For years he had indulged in his passion for art, and won considerable reputation as a careful and painstaking artist. Queenie could well afford to be proud of her father.

The child shook off Roger, and ran up to Mrs. Byington's room. With passionate vehemence she poured forth her confession, her acquaintance with Harry, her interview with her grandmother.

"You astound me, Queenie!" returned Mrs. Byington.

"Will we never get to the end of these wonders? And you love your cousin!"

"Oh, not that way!" cried Queenie, in dismay. "I am glad now that he is my cousin."

"And that accounts for Madame Grenville's unusual behavior. I suppose she must have been more than astonished. Well, Queenie, I am glad you did not tell me before. I had a dim suspicion there might be some relation, just from the similarity of name. And you are quite sure you are not in love with this handsome, chivalrous, young cousin?"

"I seem to understand, now," Queenie replied, dreamily. "Was I so very weak and wrong?"

Mrs. Byington clasped her to her heart in a transport that Queenie could not comprehend.

"You must see your father before you decide any such matter," she said. "And now good-night, little one, Maggie has been waiting for you this long while."

Roger was lingering impatiently, too, just for one last glance.

"You are not to go away with the Grenvilles," he declared in an imperious whisper. "You belong to us."

"I do not want to go," was her simple answer.

Mr. Grenville was very feeble the next morning. His breakfast was brought to him in bed. For many years he had been suffering with an incurable malady, and held his life on a frail tenure.

"I wish you would tell Harry," he said to his wife. "I cannot bear the excitement of again going over the story. Then I want you all to come in my room. You know this will make a great difference to us."

She turned her glittering eyes full upon him with a wordless question in their depths. It made him shiver.

"No;" and his voice had a curiously hollow sound. "It belongs to *her*, Sophia. It came in her mother's right.

I never have wronged any human being out of a penny ; I could not now."

"But her father is wealthy. She is only one, and there are three —"

"Don't tempt me. Harry will agree with me, I know ;" and the weary eyes closed as he laid his head back on the pillow.

Blanche had been beforehand. She had waylaid Harry, and teased him a while about his refusal to go to the Byingtons the evening before, and then glowingly described the incident, the new-found cousin, and the wonderful surprise.

"Not Miss Barretti!" and he dropped into a chair.

"Yes. And Lal told me — but this is a sort of secret — that she was dancing in the Enchanted Princess. Why, we have all seen her! and she is an enchanted princess herself, — so lovely, so sweet, and so remarkable! The Byingtons just adore her. I saw that famous Roger last night, and he is splendid!"

"Queenie!" It was all he could say for many moments. Would she love him now? Oh, if grandmanma had not gone on that insulting errand!

They were summoned to Mr. Grenville's room.

"Children," said the old man, feebly, "I have an explanation to make to you. I disinherited my daughter Ellen on her marriage, as you all know. I may have been cruel, but the disgrace of an elopement with a foreigner stung me so keenly. Your father had been married several years then, and I made him my sole heir. I had two or three letters from my daughter, which I never answered. God forgive me!"

Did the grand old woman sitting there beside her husband think that she might be any to blame for the coldness and bitterness to her stepdaughter?

He resumed. "She had been away about eight years, I think, when an old aunt of her own mother died. This

woman had lived in a most miserly and obscure manner, churlish alike to friends and relatives. She had, from time to time, made shrewd investments in real estate and stocks, and at the age of ninety-three died worth half a million. All this she left to my daughter Ellen, her heirs and assigns. We instituted a search for her, and at last learned that she had just died. There were two little boys of whose death we found a record. The husband we could not trace. Singularly enough, the little girl seems never to have been mentioned, by some inadvertence, and when two years elapsed, and there were no claimants, I took possession as my daughter's heir. So you see we have this child's fortune in our hands."

A close observer might have noted the changes that passed over Madame Grenville's face. Maggie, ignorant of the great wrong that had been done Queenie, had not confessed the fact of her strange visitor to Mr. Grenville. In truth, she had not half suspected until later, when she saw the handsome old face in the hall, hardly changed since that June day. And so Madame Grenville had just escaped a disgrace that would have been bitter and humiliating in the extreme. She had schemed for her daughter's children, salving over her conscience with the thought that they were Grenvilles as well.

"Honor will lead us to make restitution. I hope you agree with me, Harry. It will come harder on you than the others;" and he studied the proud young face, keenly.

"Agree! O grandpapa, I am thankful that we have something to give her to make amends for the hard, dreary life! No, I would never touch a penny of it!" and the voice rang out with no uncertain sound. Ah, would he have dreaded poverty with his love?

Half a million swept away! Even now Madame Grenville could have found it in her heart to strangle Queenie. Why had not the child died in a hospital, or gone irretriev-

ably astray? Had some beneficent fortune watched over her?

"Thank you, my brave, darling boy;" and the old man smiled sweetly. "You must help me to arrange this matter, Harry. As soon as we are settled at Newport we must take it in hand. I am so glad to find that we feel alike on the subject."

The waiter tapped at the door, with a note for Madame Grenville. Her cheek blanched a little as she read.

"I must see a person on some business!" she exclaimed, as if she was rather annoyed at the summons.

Down to the small reception-room she went, closing the door carefully behind her. A plainly-dressed woman stood by the window.

"What is your business with me?" was Madame Grenville's sharp query.

Margaret Donald turned, and met her gaze unflinchingly.

"I saw you last evening," the girl began, "and recognized you as the lady who came to talk about my dead mistress. You were her stepmother. Not satisfied with having her discarded you tried to thrust her child out of sight. What story did you tell her father on your return home?" and the clear eyes arraigned the stately woman before her.

"You do not know *him*," was the reply in eager extenuation. "He is pitiful now, but he was angry and implacable then. Miss Grenville's marriage was treated as a myth. How could *we* tell that the man was honorable?" glancing up defiantly. "He might have had a wife already — such things have been."

"I have come to return this;" and Maggie pulled a packet from her bosom. "It was a snare and a curse to me from the first moment. It led me to covet the child with an unholy love. I have hated it, loathed it! Here is the sum, principal and interest. Take it, or I shall throw it into the river! I will not keep it another day!"

She thrust the roll of money into the soft, jewelled hand. Madame Grenville stared in utter amazement.

"My good woman, I never go back from a bargain —"

"I will not have it! My hands shall be clean for my darling!" she answered, defiantly.

"You cannot understand it all," said the haughty old lady, with a passionate tremble in her voice. "I did it for the best. I did not want the child to suffer —"

It was still possible to save herself from infamy. The scheme that had looked so plausible years ago would blacken her now in the eyes of those she had striven to enrich by her sin. But she must sue to this woman, trail her giant pride in the dust, and that was infinitely bitter.

"I believe you to be a trusty, conscientious person," and her tone softened with deceitful grace. "There *was* a great mistake, as I learned afterward. It was impossible then to find you. Since matters have turned out so romantically well for your favorite, I desire to ask a promise — a favor —"

"Do not count too much on me."

"It is this, — easy enough for you to grant, unless you wish to embitter Miss Waldeburgh against her own relatives. Promise me that you will never mention that interview to a living soul."

"Willingly;" and yet Margaret studied the face before her with a half misgiving.

"Swear it. Let me depend upon you to the utmost."

"You may, certainly. I hate myself for having even listened to the temptation. God took her out of my hands, and my punishment must be the thought of my darling's sufferings. No, I cannot bear to have her despise me."

"Then I trust you implicitly, — remember that. Yet I wish you would keep the money as a gift —"

"No, no!" and the girl shivered. "That was all I had to say."

Madame Grenville bowed a polite dismissal, and Margaret withdrew; a long breath of satisfaction welling up from her soul. Nor was her hostess less relieved. The family would never know this, and she could still hold her head high among them. But oh, the fatal madness of her visit to Queenie! If Harry could have known how keenly she bewailed this blunder it might have proved a comfort as to her punishment.

But the present sting was the haunting fear that Harry had not been loved with the ardor of a young girl's first absorbing regard. It might have been fanned into an abiding flame. Had the golden moment really gone by? Here was that fascinating Roger Lasselle, a hero in her eyes, doubtless, and the haughty woman bit her lip at having thus outwitted herself.

As for Harry Grenville, he felt crushed and stunned. His generous soul had delighted in the prospect of bestowing so much upon her, — could he turn and woo her as an heiress? Would not the Byingtons believe him actuated by mercenary motives? Had she known that day when she went away so joyfully, leaving him no clue?

He had insisted that the facts should be made known to her as soon as possible. For a while at least, he must stand aloof. If she loved him —

"Clara," Madame Grenville said graciously at lunch, turning to her daughter, "I think you and Blanche ought to call on Miss Waldeburgh, and ask her to come to us at Newport. We were all so startled and confused last evening. Her grandfather is anxious the breach shall be healed, and if we were cool now, it would be attributed to our disinclination to give up the fortune. No one can regret that unfortunate stage episode more than I;" and she glanced around with proud complacency; "but I think it can be managed if the Byingtons are careful, so that the world shall know nothing about it."

"Grandmamma," Harry interrupted pointedly, "I think

it the noblest act that could crown any life. She did not do it for fame, or from any sense of pleasure to herself, but for others."

"We cannot publish her motives to the whole world, Harry, and she *did* attain considerable notoriety. We should hardly care to take in our home a woman whose only recommendation was skilful ballet-dancing. However, my ideas may belong to the refinements of a past generation. I am growing old, I know;" with a pathetic little laugh that was a half sigh.

"I shall be delighted!" cried Blanche. "You will come with us, Harry. You would not go last night —"

A sudden paleness and pain crossed his face, much to his sister's amazement.

Could he see her first in the presence of others? Oh, what cruel things had his grandmother said to her? Yet, if they took up kindly relations it would go hard indeed if he could not persuade her to forget that shameful interview, to remember that he had loved her for her own sweet self.

A week had wrought a wondrous change in Queenie — or was it her new position? Of the fortune she was still in ignorance. Something about her chilled him with swift apprehension: the cordiality with which she accepted the relationship, as if she wished that to make amends.

Mrs. Grenville was a soft, pleasant woman, with no corners or angles, inheriting neither her mother's beauty nor that startling individuality. Queenie was attracted by the very unlikeness. The girls were fond and cousinly. Blanche was prepared to accept any favorite of her lover's family; but Queenie's winsome beauty would have conquered stronger obstacles.

Mrs. Byington promised readily that she would afford them frequent opportunities of meeting. For the present, she and Mr. Byington considered their claim was the strongest; indeed, they felt answerable to her father, to

whom the joyful tidings had been sent, and who would, no doubt, hasten to America.

Once Harry managed to whisper, "I shall write to you," but he felt that it would be ungenerous to ask a private interview.

There came a few days of comparative quiet to Queenie, for which she was deeply grateful. Roger never tired nor exhausted her. He planned, and she acquiesced. He constituted himself her music teacher, and they learned duets, they read, they sat with aunt Alice, and talked in a joyous unconstrained manner, though she rarely spoke of her past.

Was it wrong or selfish to throw them so much together? Mrs. Byington asked herself.

Harry's missive came, a wild, imploring love-letter. The young girl read it with crimson cheeks and throbbing pulses. Oh, what should she do? He had loved her so generously when there was no one else, when she was a stage-dancer, living in an obscure home, would it not be blackest ingratitude to refuse him now?

"What can I say?" she asked Mrs. Byington, with passionate, yearning anguish.

"I think, my darling, that you have no right to dispose of your future until your father is here to sanction it. You may come to understand your own heart better, and feel quite differently. At present, gratitude is the strongest," and Mrs. Byington flushed a trifle, as she hesitated. Was she entirely sincere! Did not her heart incline to Roger?

"At least," she resumed, after a pause, "I would beg him not to discuss the matter until your father's return. You belong to him, first of all."

That was the only shadow on Queenie's happy summer. Captain Mullins came home, and there was the wildest joy in the household. Queenie went for a whole long day, and the children sent Roger an invitation to supper. What a merry, boisterous time it was! Every child seemed to have stored up a special remembrance of what Queenie had said or done in the dark night of their sorrow.

"I don't know what I can ever do for you," said Captain Mullins, with tears in his honest eyes. "If you'd been an angel you couldn't have brought 'em into port any better, and they must love you always and forever. The good Lord reward you —"

"He has, already," replied Queenie, reverently.

"The children are all so improved. I never saw the beat of it. Why, Tip's a real gentleman, and he says it's all owing to you. Cissy's growing pretty as a picture, and as for the twins, any man might be proud of 'em! How you and sister Madeira managed it puzzles me. I am glad enough your ship came in, though if it hadn't you'd never be let to want for anything. God bless you child! You deserve the very best, and may it always be yours."

Miss Madeira laughed, and cried, and grew more incoherent and mismatched with every sentence.

"It's all right, thank the Lord!" she said, at parting, "but I don't know how to live without you. I'm a foolish old body, sure enough!"

Queenie followed up her good work by interesting Mr. Byington in Tip. The boy had come to manly wants and aspirations, and this kindly helping hand was the foundation of all his after fortune and success.

Tim Chafney called upon Queenie, when the joyful news reached him. His surprise was absolutely laughable. He could only think of the little Nora who had clung to him, but this exquisitely beautiful girl astounded him. Still, no one rejoiced more truly in her restoration.

They took the promised trip to Newport. Queenie shyly sheltered herself under Mrs. Byington's wing, but her beauty would have been remarked anywhere. Madame Grenville introduced her with great *empressement*, quite determined to make amends for her former neglect. It became whispered about that the young girl's father was a baron, and in spite of herself Queenie again played the part of heroine unconsciously.

Early in September the Grenvilles were to return South. Lucia's marriage was appointed for October. Lawrence plead for a union at the same time. The engagement had been brief, to be sure, but Mrs. Byington was impatient to welcome Blanche in her own household, the long-coveted daughter.

Mr. Grenville preferred that it should be so, and the elder ladies acquiesced. He had arranged with Harry that generous bridal portions should be bestowed upon his sisters, and Grenville, the family birthright, go to him.

"You are to be *my* bridesmaid, Queenie," announced Blanche, "you and Harry; we have it all planned. You are to come to Grenville, it is such a beautiful old place. And some of the neighbors remember your mother so well. Oh, my darling Queenie, I am so glad that your father is alive, and an honorable gentleman, so that your mother's memory will be rescued from the cloud under which it has rested. It *was* cruel in grandpapa to disown her."

"But he is so sorry now," pleaded Queenie, generously.

Roger Lasselle was startled, one day, when the situation flashed upon him! Harry Grenville adored his cousin, and she —

He would have plunged into an explanation at once, but aunt Alice wisely restrained him. Perhaps it would not have been in her power but for the admission of Queenie's feelings on the subject.

"It would be unmanly to speak," he allowed. "But if I should lose her! Oh, aunt Alice, she belongs to me, she is part of my very soul!"

"She belongs to her father, Roger;" yet, Mrs. Byington hoped as ardently as her nephew.

This was the one bitter flavor in the cup of joy, alas! that it should be said of so many precious things. Harry was miserable and jealous. Roger's happy face and joyous voice was a continual torment. She quietly avoided *tête à tête* with him, while she went to Roger with a half shy unreserve that maddened him.

Madame Grenville watched. She was too wise to rouse Queenie's suspicions by any vehement protestations or caresses, but drew her near with a subtle fascination that rarely failed when she willed to succeed. She had not given up hope. Let her have Queenie in their own home, away from the Byington's, when the announcement of the fortune came to be made, and surely she could not have the cruelty to despoil Harry, who would have married her in obscurity. Her grateful nature would prove their strongest ally.

The proud old woman's bitterest pang was her grandson's suffering, when, but for her hasty interference, he might have had all in his own hands. She could have doomed Queenie to a life of poverty and temptation, without a scruple of remorse, torn out that tender love-dream, and flung it on the dreary plains of desertion to die unpitied. She should always hate the child, she felt, and yet she would fain move heaven and earth to make her the wife of her idol grandson, the last Grenville.

They parted cordially on both sides, except, perhaps, the rival young men. Queenie had steadfastly refused to discuss the subject until her father's return. Her regard was a sister's tenderness, rather than the absorbing affection that leads to a wife's love.

The Byingtons went to Canada, and the lakes, as the best way of diverting Queenie. Oh, what a glorious thing it was to live when one was no longer a slave! And yet, if Dick Bridger could come back and see his little Queen for one brief moment! That part of her past seemed to stand out so vividly.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

QUEEN OF HIS HEART.

BARON WALDEBURGH had come.

Queenie had been clasped to a father's heart in a transport of joy, kissed by the lips that had been first to press her's in their baby sweetness, and that more than ten long years before had touched them with a sorrowing farewell.

Her wonder presently gave way to a deep, delicious sense of intimate relationship. Here was some one all her own, who had known and loved her mother.

She ventured to look at him shyly after a while. Not so tall as Roger, indeed, barely medium height, with fair hair, dreamy blue eyes, a tawny beard, and an indescribable foreign air. Here she had caught her eager, winsome grace, but in her the impetuosity had been toned by the repression of circumstances.

"You have your mother's faultless complexion, my child, and certain of her expressions, but that eager, artistic temperament came from the Waldeburgh side. Ah, my darling, how cruel that we should have been separated all these years! Has God some divine compensation in the future? Will He make us forget the pain and the pangs? Surely, my precious child, the rest of your life ought to be like a rare poem set to music."

It seemed as if he would never tire of clasping her in his arms and pouring out the rapture of love. They were like children together, his vivid imagination, sanguine temperament, and nervous, poetic grace still holding the charm of youth. Even Roger waived his imperious claim, and enjoyed her wonderful happiness.

Mr. Grenville indited a courteous letter to his son-in-law, expressing his most poignant regret for the past, and begging him to visit Grenville Place, where a fortune awaited his child. As her natural guardian he must make some provision concerning it.

Queenie heard it then for the first time.

"Of course we must go, papa," she said, in a gravely sweet tone. "But oh, I wish there was no fortune! I should hate to take it from them, and since poor mamma is dead —"

"Ah, if it could have come earlier!" and the response was like a wail.

Victor Waldeburgh contrasted his present welcome with the years of silent neglect that had helped to send his wife to her early grave. He accepted their overtures with the dignity of a breeding quite equal to theirs, but he could not forget. As an exile, and poor, would they thus have honored him? Yet he felt a strange, secret sympathy with the broken old man who put aside the prejudices of his class, and earnestly strove to make amends.

The double wedding was a grand affair, the pride and talk of the county, and Baron Waldeburgh and his daughter contributed no little to its prestige. The brides started on their tour. Lucia was to return, her husband being a southerner, but Blanche was to spend the winter with Mrs. Byington.

And now Queenie felt sadly out of her element. The influence Madame Grenville had counted on, began to do its subtle work. Harry's mother was unconsciously swayed by her genuine affection and the sense of loss she experienced by the absence of her daughters. His own troubled, half-reproachful, face pained her generous soul. Was her good fortune to work ill to him who would have taken her from poverty and placed her on a throne?

"Papa," she began one morning — "is there no other way? Must I take this fortune? Harry will be so much

poorer, and he has been brought up to expect it, while a little with you would render me happy?

Waldeburgh enclosed the sweet face in his hands and studied the troubled eyes.

"My precious darling, tell me truly if you love the young man, if you would like to marry him?"

"Oh, papa!" and with a sob of genuine distress the tears overflowed.

"Queenie, my child, you do not love him! Shall I say selfishly that I am glad! He loves you truly, but he has that handsome, evil old woman's blood in his veins. He is not to blame, but for all that I could never cordially take him to my heart. Madame has done me the honor to suggest the match—but I am answered by your reluctance. I have enough for both. We will go away somewhere, and when you are of age you may divide the fortune—"

"Oh, can I?" cried the child joyfully. "You take such a burden off my soul, dear, sweet papa! And I am a frightful little ignoramus,—you would hardly believe it, because I can dance and sing, and go into society without blundering. But I have had so little chance for real study. And you might teach me. I would be so industrious;" and the lustrous, wistful eyes were turned upon him.

"It shall be so my daughter. Their money or regard cannot give back to us the dead. The fortune can be placed in the hands of trustees until you come of age. I am proud to have you relinquish it, though I am not rich enough to make amends. But you are sure you do not love your cousin?"

"Quite sure. Oh, is it wicked? He was so good to me."

"No, my child, no;" and he kissed her tenderly.

The Grenvilles were greatly surprised at the decision. The matter was put in legal shape, Baron Waldeburgh relinquishing all right as Queenie's possible heir. The

haughty Madame insisted to her daughter that it was no more than just.

"But oh, if she could love Harry in time to come!" moaned Mrs. Grenville. "His heart will break."

Grandmamma smiled derisively. There were other pretty girls in the world. The fortune was what she coveted, and so, after all, she was satisfied.

But Harry would not let her go without daring his fate. He plead with rare tenderness, impetuosity, and the truth of a loyal heart. Almost she was tempted to sacrifice herself.

"Promise me this, at least," he cried in despairing eagerness. "Wait and let the remembrance of that hateful interview die out of your mind. Give me a year of cousinly regard, with no rival between. Make no engagement—"

"I promise to remain quite free. I want no lover but papa. Surely, I owe him some share of my life, when we have been separated so long!"

Could it be that her girlish heart was untouched? Was Roger's regard a friendly interest, merely? Well, he would wait—that was all now left him.

The father and daughter exchanged a kindly farewell with their relatives. There was a brief stay at New York to settle a few plans. Kate Bridger begged to accompany them abroad. She cast off her second husband's name, and would have no reminder of him. Maggie had loved the little Miss Nora, but she could not quite transform her into the dazzling Queenie, a father's idolized darling. Besides, she was deeply attached to Mrs. Byington.

For Queenie, the strange, checkered life was at an end. One could predict a peaceful future.

Almost two years have passed since then. It is summer again, but the scene is a pretty Florentine villa with its

luxuriant grounds, its quaint, old world beauty, the rich hue of vineyards and olive orchards, the sparkle of wayside rills, the chime of tinkling bells, the soft, warm dawns, the mellow noons, the slumbrous shadows of eventide, and the fragrance of orange-blooms.

She seems still a child, this sweet, beguiling Queenie, with her brown, velvety, pathetic eyes, her shining hair that has still the glint of childhood, and her lissome, petite figure. But as you study her you find an indescribable alteration, a something that enhances every charm, a grace that deepens, transfixes, fascinates. Retired as they have lived, more than one suitor has found her out, and besieged her father for her hand. At Milan a great musician was entranced with her rarely beautiful voice, and was fain to persuade her into fame and fortune.

There was a moment's vision of the eager faces that had once been turned upon Queen Titania; there was an echo of the deafening applause as the weary little child risked life and limb for the gratification of the multitude. No, she could never minister to that gaping, imperious public again. What did she want of fame now!

Down below, just at the edge of the shady walk, are two young men, familiar faces both, but the expression they wear is widely different. One is filled with exultant, absorbing satisfaction, that cannot be wholly veiled; the other has dared, and lost the most precious boon life holds.

"Then you will not wait? We are to go so soon," says Roger Lasselle, trying to temper his tone.

"Wait! Ah, do you think I can endure everything?" is the unconsciously fierce rejoinder. Then the voice falls to an inflection of anguish. "You have been a noble rival, Roger, but from the very first I feared you held all in your hands! Perhaps it was madness to hope, to try; but I loved her so! If you had not crossed her path, — forgive, but

mine, too, is the love of a lifetime. I need hardly wish you joy. Queenie Waldeburgh's husband will not need to go begging for that! Good-by. Sometime, when it is an old story, I may venture to remember that she is my cousin;" and the voice is choked by a great gasp of emotion.

"Heaven comfort you!" says Roger, huskily, and the fine eyes fill with tears. He has won, but only he knows what the other has lost.

Roger walks slowly up the curved path. There is a flash of white raiment, and a hand is slipped in his. He knows she has been crying, and now he does not even kiss the lovely face. This hour shall be sacred to memory. They will have a whole long life for their joy.

"He loved me so," she murmurs brokenly. "He would have married me fresh from the stage, in all my poverty. I can never forget that!"

"And I would have searched the world through for you, Queenie," with a touch of tender reproach. "I have loved you only — why, I do believe I envied Dick Barretti when he clasped you in his arms. And if you had been —"

"Poor Dick! He loved me too!" she interrupts, with fresh tears.

"And everybody," says Roger, with a prodigal construction. "You were born with an enchantress' gift, and I shall hardly consider you safe until you are chained with a wedding-ring. And I do hope, if I had not been in the world, that you would have loved Harry."

"I think I must have, Roger," she answers, with the sweet innocence of her soul.

Papa Waldeburgh sits smoking his amber pipe. He has learned to take lovers philosophically, and accepts his future son-in-law gladly, knowing that now he can be pestered by no more suitors. Queenie has planned that they are to

go back to the new world she still loves, and have a pretty half-country, half-city home, with a studio for papa and a library for Roger.

"And my room just between," she says, laughingly, "so that when I hear a heated discussion I can sally out and part the combatants, and temper the atmosphere."

"Why, I like Roger myself!" says papa, with great round eyes.

"Then it is I who will be torn with the pangs of jealousy, and consumed by slow neglect;" and a short, delicious laugh ripples on the air.

A fortnight later, in simple white and orange blooms, she gives her hand to Roger. Her heart has been his since the morning he told the story of his search, in Miss Madeira's stuffy little parlor.

They are to stop a while in London, and then return home.

There have been some changes in the far-away households. Grandpapa Grenville is dead, and Lucia is reigning in her own home. The Madame and her daughter keep widowed state in the great, solitary house. Harry has gone on to Egypt, then it will be India. The stately, still handsome old woman knows that she has helped to mar his life, and make him a wanderer. In her secret heart she pines for him, and understands, too late, that coveted gold does not always bring peace.

Blanche and Lawrence are very happy with a baby daughter that Mrs. Byington kisses and claims. But whether she will be called Elsinore or Titania no one seems able to decide.

Miss Madeira is perhaps the most astounded at her destiny. She is Mrs. Captain Mullins. Queenie laughed heartily over the letters announcing it.

Moppet wrote, —

"We just planned it ourselves, Queenie. Don't you remember that once we had almost a fight because we

were afraid she would be our stepmother. But we all loved her so, and we wanted her to be our mother in real earnest; and we talked it over, all but the twins, I mean, and when pa came home I asked him if it couldn't be, and he laughed a little, but said he'd ask auntie Madeira. She would not hear of it at first, and said she was too old, and everything; but we all begged, and she promised, if we would go on calling her auntie Madeira. But no matter, she's our own darling, loveliest mother, and we're happy as crickets. Pa comes home every fortnight. Tip is getting eight hundred a year: think of it! Pug is a real good boy. We call him Sidney now, and his nose isn't so stubby. I have a beautiful blue silk dress, and I went to a real party with Tip, in white kid gloves, and flowers in my hair, and I wear ear-rings."

There was a little scrawl from auntie Madeira:

"You'll think I'm an old fool, with one foot in the grave, and never expecting such a thing, but just being set in my ways and old-maidish like, with a thin spot on my head where the hair has nearly all fallen out, and I have to wear a bit of lace and ribbon that's no more like a cap than a pink silk sunshade is like a big gingham umbrella; and me never following any fashions, my dear, but now having my skirts trimmed, and walking out leaning on a man's arm, as if I was sixteen and sentimental, and all red in the face and flustered when any one asks for Mrs. Mullins, as if poor sister might get out of her grave. I sometimes wonder what the poor dear thinks, and if she's vexed; but I've made up my mind to give him up when we get to heaven, her claim being first, and he a good, kind-hearted man, who never gives his children a cross word, though, my dear, the old Adam is still strong in 'em, and he having had a rough row to hoe, and deserves that some one should care for him, and lay out his clothes with buttons and strings all right; and I never could see how they manage to get 'em off so; but its the ways of Providence and past finding out,

but just sewing them back every time. I'm sincerely happy, and trying to do my duty, which I hope isn't wrong, for it does seem as if a man needed a wife more than ever when he's lost his first and left with a family, and twins who'd never know the difference; but out of respect to sister in her grave I didn't want 'em to call me mother; and they've all improved so you wouldn't know 'em, Tip being a real gentleman, for which the credit is due you, my darling Queenie."

Queenie could see it like a picture. "And I suppose people will wonder how he came to marry that plain old woman," she thought. "They cannot see her quaint, tender, generous soul, that will never grow old."

Roger listened delightedly, and wondered where they went for a wedding-tour.

Madame Denzil gains in fame, and is a favorite in attractive society-plays. Miss Fay has married quite to her liking. Mam'selle Zelig is at the head of a flourishing troop, who have made burlesques famous.

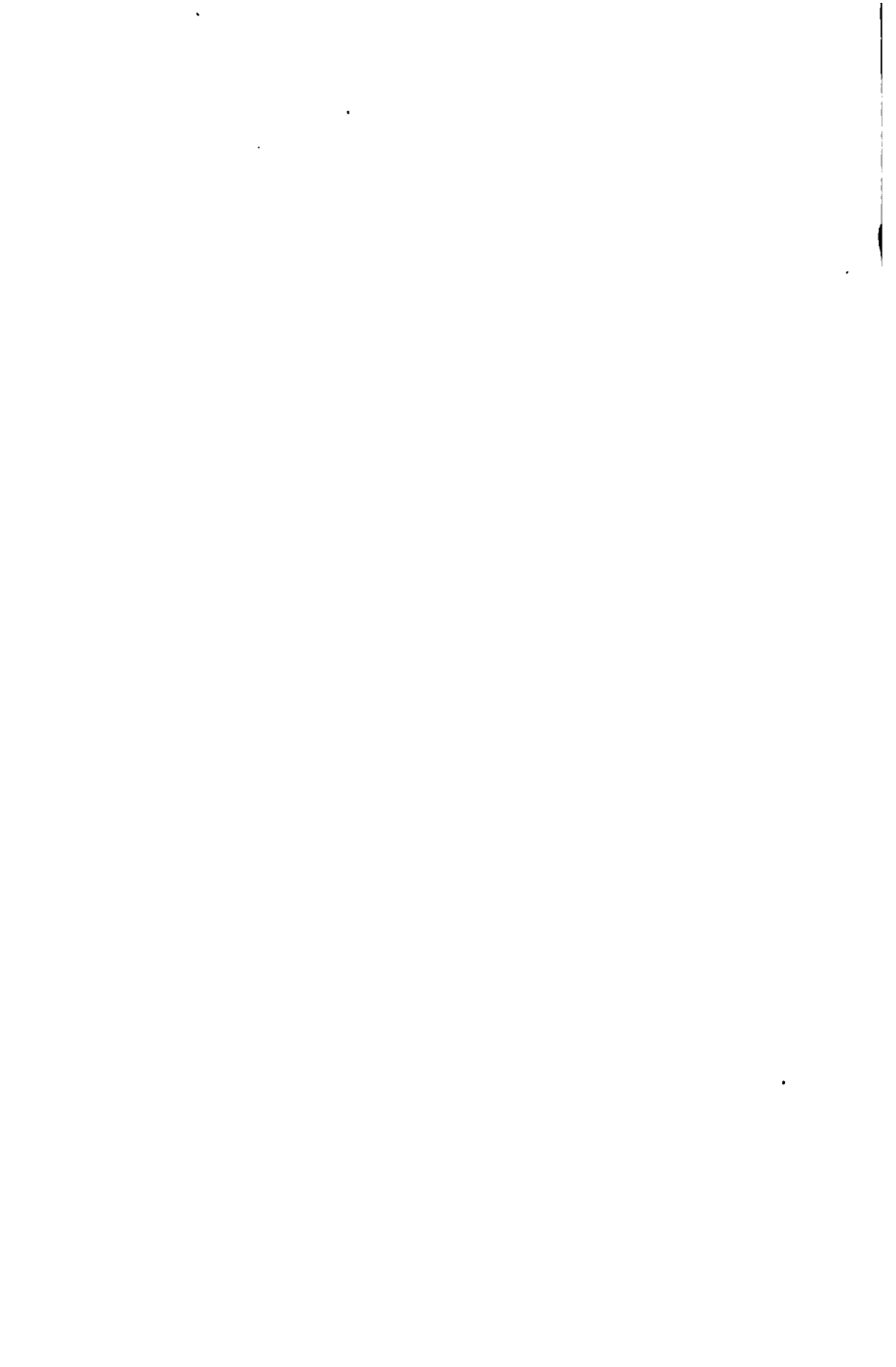
Dainty, delicately clothed in purple and fine linen, surrounded on every side by love and luxury, Mrs. Roger Lasselle wends her way.

"I declare, aunt Alice," laughs Roger, "if I did not put my foot down in a most tyrannical manner she would turn the house into an orphan asylum and hospital, and heaven only knows what else. It is lucky that Prince Fortunatus fills her purse, and has a silver mine to back him.

Queenie smiles out of soft, bewildering, brown eyes. She can never forget what she has seen little children suffer. She is pitiful to their sorrows, and is made glad in their joys.









LOST IN A GREAT CITY



BY FRANK DOUGLAS